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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE EFFECTS OF GRADE REPETITION AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

by

ANN FOSTER

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

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DATED November 30, 1984

ABSTRACT

The central focus of this study was a description of grade repetition at the Junior High School level. Subjects were 20 students in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 repeating Grade 7, 8 or 9 during the 1983/84 school year. Their subjective reality was explored, that is, their perceptions of different aspects of the retention experience particularly its effects on academic achievement, peer relationships and attitude towards school and teachers. Year end marks in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies achieved both before and after retention were compared. Furthermore, teacher perceptions of the effects of retention upon these students were obtained.

Data were collected by means of four sets of instruments; audiotapes of individual students, students questionnaires, student school records and teacher questionnaires.

Findings indicated that although the majority of students recalled painful memories of their first days as a "repeater" and expressed regret over the loss of friendships from the previous year, ultimately most coped reasonably well with a situation generally perceived as undesirable and unpleasant. Overall, for the majority, retention was perceived as exerting neither a significantly harmful nor helpful effect on accademic achievement, peer relationships and attitude towards school and teachers. A few students did however experience deterioration along these dimensions. At the other extreme, teacher perceptions tended to be rosier than students.

In terms of actual marks obtained before repeating and after, the average amount of increase in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies was 2.5 points, that is, for example, from a D to less than a C. Most students obtained minimum passing grades the second time around. One third of the students, however, still had failing marks in two or more subjects at the end of the year of repetition. Furthermore, three of these students failed in subjects they had passed the previous year. Generally, most students were not much better prepared to handle the more difficult work at the next grade level than they had been the year before.

It was concluded, therefore, that the educational dollar might be better spent investigating causes of individual student's low achievement and developing more economical and effective ways of improving it, than prescribing grade repetition. Alternatives to it were suggested.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The value of the practice of retaining a low-achieving student in an Elementary or Junior High School grade, in terms of academic progress, social well-being and attitude towards school is debatable. Research demonstrating the superiority of either grade retention or social promotion is inconclusive to date. There are as many studies in support of one procedure as the other with some highly questionable methodologies on both sides (Leiberman 1980). Neither grade retention nor social promotion per se seem to solve the educational problems of low achieving students because both retained students and their matched but promoted counterparts consistently fail to be "healed" by their respective treatments. Both groups continue to perform far below the class average even if given a change to "catch up" for one or more years (ERIC 1981).

Gregg Jackson (1975) conducted an intensive examination of 44 original research studies on grade retention from 1911 through to mid 1973. He concluded that the accumulated research evidence was so poor that valid inferences could not be drawn concerning the relative benefits of the two options. Thus those educators who retain students in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties, than will promotion to the next grade.

Despite such conclusions reached nine years ago, educators still continue to retain students. A survey of 150 elementary, secondary and special education

teachers done by Miller, Frazier and Richey (1980) indicated a general agreement (based on experience and observations) that grade retention does not promote subject matter mastery and may be detrimental to the child's self-concept. Yet, paradoxically, despite an awareness of such negative aspects of retention, most of these teachers favoured retention as a practice and had made retention recommendations during their careers.

The present organisation of Elementary and Junior High Schools requires that teachers make such decisions at the end of the school year to determine the most appropriate placement for students the following year, to best foster all-round development : academic, social and emotional. Ogilvie (1961) states that making placement decisions on behalf of low achieving students can be difficult and worrisome. Bossing concurs (1980). He believes that if teachers were to make a list of their most difficult decisions concerning students during the school year, the promotion/retention dilemma would surely appear.

"To retain or not to retain?" is a question that can arouse intense emotional reactions, pro and con, in those directly and/or indirectly involved. Such intensity is apparent in research articles with titles ranging from "Elementary School Retention : An Unjustifiable, Discrimination and Noxious Policy" (Abiden 1980) at one extreme, to "Retention : A Step Forward" (Ames 1980) at the other. This writer has observed teacher anxiety at the Elementary level generated by anticipation of parent-teacher interviews at which a recommendation to retain a particular student will be presented to his parents and discussed. Parental reactions to such a suggestion have been observed to range from support and acceptance, through disappointment and

resignation, to aggressive determination to oppose such placement. Parents who originate from educational systems outside Canada where automatic promotion is the norm (e.g. England), seem particularly opposed to retention. Some parents seem to view retention of their child as a social and intellectual stigma, detrimental to the child's emotional well-being. Some teachers make reassurances to the contrary, and reframe retention as a "time for growth and development". Despite such positive terminology, negative connotations still persist - not only to parents but among students too.

As a teacher at the Elementary level, this writer has observed year-end report cards seized and scrutinised for the answer to the question "Did I pass?" ..... "Did I FAIL?" Distress has also been noticed in young students in reaction to verbal taunts from peers regarding retention, the worst kinds of insults being "You flunked.." "You're a dummy....". Similar distress has been observed at the secondary level too. For example; two retained girls watching their former classmates be presented with commemorative certificates upon graduation from Junior High School applauded with the rest of the audience .... but wept at their enforced exclusion from the ceremony.

Such observations invoke questions as to whether the following "Goal of schooling for Alberta" is being fulfilled for retained students:

> "...students (from Grade 1 to 12) will be provided with the opportunity and means to:
> ....aquire knowledge and develop skills, attitudes and habits which contribute ....to mental and social well-being...."

<u>The problem under investigation.</u>

A number of researchers support retention in the early Elementary school grades as being more beneficial to academic progress, and social and emotional

well-being than retention in the higher grades (Goodlad, 1954; Thompson, 1977; Ames, 1980; Lieberman, 1980; Kerzner, 1981; Van Zant, 1982). In fact, most of the research that has been done regarding the effects of grade repetition relates to students at the Elementary level. Very little has been done at the Junior High School level.

Ray Purkeson and Edie Whitfield (1981) after extensive referencing and cross referencing could not locate a single study reporting the effects of retention on middle schoolers or Junior High schoolers either in relation to achievement or other factors. This writer located only two studies done in the past 25 years which have used Junior High School students as subjects - Allison 1959 and Gaite 1969. Neither of these researchers had contact with the students concerned whilst these students were actually experiencing a year of repetition. Data were collected from student record files. The subjective reality of retained Junior High School students has not been described - their feelings, attitudes and opinions regarding repeating a grade have not been documented. Thus it seems that further investigation into the situation of such students might be warranted because a) little has been done at this level, b) what little exists does not indicate that retention is justified academically c) there is no information regarding the perceived impact of retention on other factors important to adolescents such as changes in peer relationships, yet d) retention at this level occurs.

Such information could perhaps be used to sensitize teachers of repeating students to the particular concerns and needs that arise out of the retention situation. Such information could also have implications for guidance activities

at the Junior High School level. Such information could be of value to School District personel questioning the efficacy of grade retention at this level.

Purpose of the study.

Basically, the purpose of this study is to attempt to paint a picture of grade retention at the Junior High School level in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 during the 1983/84 school year. This will be done by:

1. Describing the subjective reality of twenty Junior High School students who are repeating Grade 7, 8 or 9 in St. Albert P.S.S.D. #6 from September 1983 to June 1984. In order to do this, data will be collected from them regarding their current and/or retrospective perceptions of:
   - the reason(s) for having to repeat the grade,
   - the initial impact of this decision,
   - their current attitude towards the retention decision,
   - their emotional reactions at the beginning of the year of repetition,
   - coping behaviors utilized at that time,
   - parental reactions to the retention,
   - sibling reactions to the retention,
   - changes in academic achievement in Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies,
   - changes in attitude towards school and teachers,
   - repeating in terms of relationships with current classmates,
   - repeating in terms of relationships with promoted peers,
   - changes in feelings about self,

   In addition, data will also be collected from these students regarding their

opinions concerning the following:

- their plans for the future in terms of schooling and employment,
- grade retention as a practice at the Junior High School level,
- possible alternatives to grade retention,

2. Collecting year end marks in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies obtained in June 1983 and June 1984 in order that comparisons be made and degree of academic improvement (if any) be recorded.
3. Collecting data from a teacher nominated by each student regarding:
   - each teacher's perceptions of changes in each student's academic achievement, changes in attitude towards school and teachers, and changes in peer relationships during the 1983/84 year of repetition,
   - each teacher's opinions regarding the practice of retention,
   - each teacher's suggestions regarding alternatives to grade retention for low achieving students.

Limitations of the study.

This thesis is restricted to a descriptive study of grade retention at the Junior High School level in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 as perceived by twenty students repeating Grade 7, 8 or 9 in June 1984, and thirteen teachers familiar with these students. Thus, generalizations to other schools, repeating students and teachers, regarding different aspects of grade retention, should be done with great caution.

Definition of terms.

For this study, the following terms will be used:

1. Grade repetition. This is the practice of requiring that a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year remain at that level for a subsequent year. In other words, a retained student is one who has spent two consecutive years in the same grade. Other terms to be used interchangeably with "grade repetition" in the study are: "repeating", "grade repetition", "non-promotion", "failing", "flunking" and "keeping back".
2. Promotion. This is defined as the movement of a student from one grade to a higher one at the end of the school year, based on his academic achievement during the last year, to pursue a more advanced academic program.
3. Social promotion. This is defined as the practice of allowing a student to progress from one grade to a higher one at the end of the school year, with his same age peers, exclusively on the basis of chronological age, regardless of academic achievement. It is also referred to as "continuous promotion", and "automatic promotion" in this study.
4. Peers. These are defined as students belonging to the same group in the school setting, with membership being determined by chronological age, grade or status. In this study, "peers" will refer to a student's classmates, that is, others at his current grade level, unless otherwise indicated as in "same age but promoted peers".
5. Failing marks. The following are regarded as failing marks by the schools involved in this study: F, D-, D and D+.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the main focus of this study is repetition at the Junior High School level, research concerning repetition at all levels will be reviewed, along the dimensions outlined in the "Purpose of the study" section, because of the possible bearing such information might have on the main issue.

Historical background.

The question of student promotion/retention is bound by the history of our schools (Seldon 1982). The first Canadian schools were not graded. They tended to be one room buildings with one teacher catering to a wide range of ages and abilities. In the early 19th century a pupil progressed at his own rate in learning the content required. At mid-century, however, "the want of proper grading" was considered to be a major defect of the schools (Phillips 1957). The organisation of the grade school was, therefore, an administrative development of importance designed "to keep the range of achievement within each grade at a minimum" (Ogilvie 1961), perhaps to facilitate teaching.

The graded compulsory school that eventually evolved, divided students into classes according to their achievement. Once placed, all students in a class were to pursue the same studies at the same time and were not to advance in one subject until they had achieved the same levels in all other subjects. Grade retention provided the means of maintaining the graded system. Students were kept at the same grade level until they had met the established standards. So grade repetition was derived in a large measure from a failure to meet the expectations of the teachers and the school system.

But the practice of retention in time produced large numbers of failures. By the early 1900's, failure had become a major educational problem (Thompson 1980). Growing public concern led to a growing body of research questioning the value of retention. That question is still relevant today.

Reasons for retaining students.

Purkeson and Whitfield (1980) categorised oft-quoted reasons for retention of students in grades under the following:

- administrative decree,
- student under-achievement and/or immaturity,
- environmental influences,
- teacher/student personality conflicts,

Youngs (1980) surveyed Elementary Schools in Colorado U.S.A. and her findings regarding reasons given by educators in support of retaining students concur with and add to the above as follows:

1. student and parent support for the retention,
2. low academic functioning,
3. social immaturity,
4. young chronological age,
5. small physical size,
6. slow intellectual ability,
7. frequent absences,
8. deprived home life,
9. poor language skills,
10. lack of effort.

In general, it seems that a variety of social, personal and environmental elements contribute initially to low achievement, and subsequently to non-promotion.

In terms of student support for the retention (see 1 above), there is research to suggest that students respond positively to a retention decision perceived as just, deserved and helpful; and negatively to a retention decision perceived as unjust, undeserved and spiteful (ERIC 1981). In connection with parent support for the retention, Lunden's 1979 findings concur with Young's in that parents can be extremely influential in determining the outcomes of the placement decision. However, it was found that they are generally opposed to it.

Educators who support grade retention typically use the following arguments to justify their position:

1. Promoting a low achieving student to the next grade may expose him to failure daily because he will be unable to handle the academic program. Consequently his confidence in himself, and in his ability to suceed in educational situations may diminish.
2. Promoting a child who lacks the prerequisite skills for the next grade may extend the range of abilities of that class, thus "holding back" the rest of the class, and making teaching that class a more arduous task.
3. Promoting a low achieving student to the next higher grade might reflect detrimentally on the teaching skills of his former teacher.
4. Promoting a child who has not "earned" such higher placement by appropriate academic performance will not prepare him for the competitive life he will encounter as an adult.

5. Promoting a child who has "failed" is unfair to those students who have worked hard for their grade promotion.

6. Promotion is not justified in the case of a child who has been absent a great deal or in the case of the very immature child. Retention will provide time to "catch up" and "time to grow".

According to W. H. Haddad (1979) repetition tends to be regarded by school systems that practice it as an appropriate investment in pupil recovery, justified by the following assumptions:

a) that the determinants of achievement and failure are academic,

b) that a pupil's actual level of achievement can be accurately determined,

c) that repetition improves achievement,

d) that retention provides a better affective learning environment for low achievers.

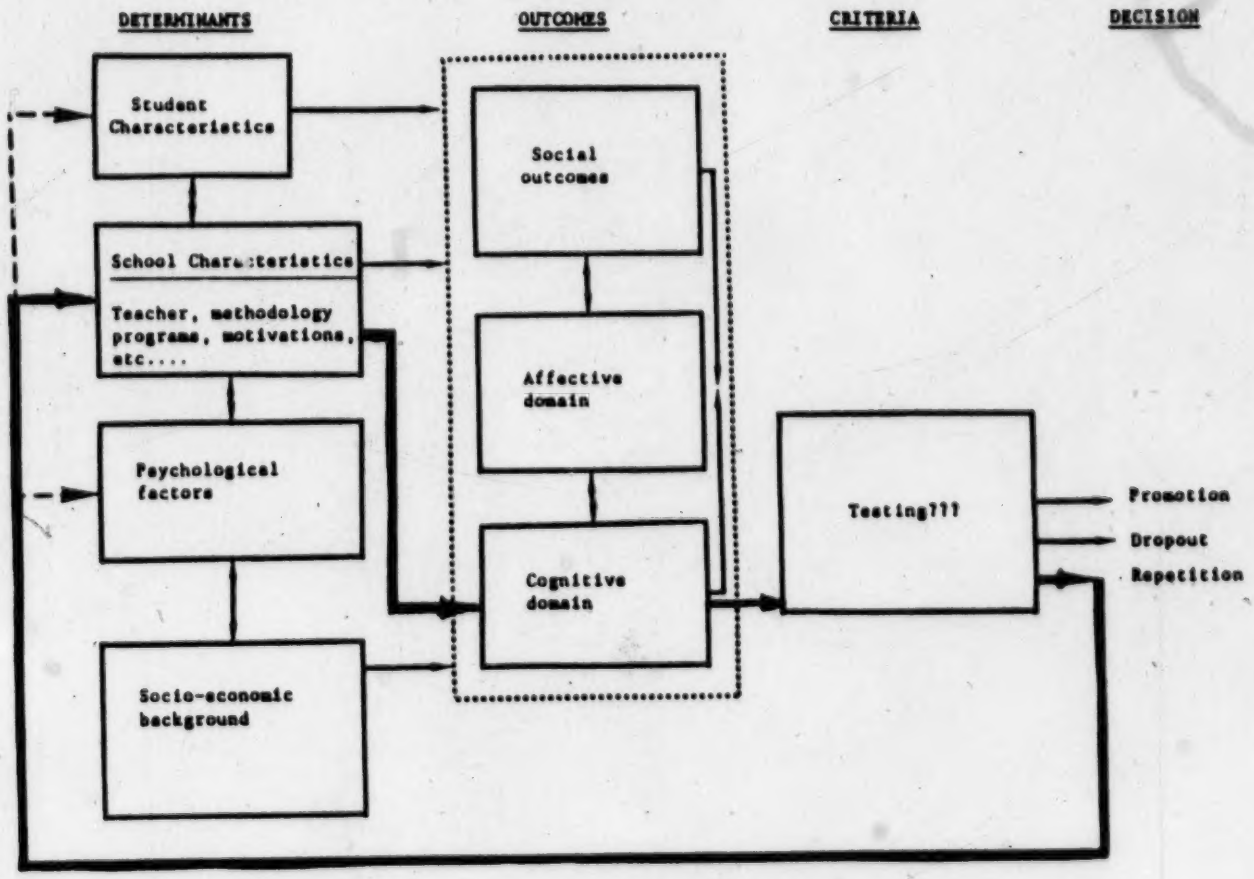
The linear causal model generated by these assumptions is depicted by the bold arrows in Table 1. Haddad says that research findings seriously challenge both the linear model and the underlying assumptions. A synthesis of research results leads instead, to a multi-dimensional interactive matrix of variables that describe the dynamics of success and failure (Table 1). It might be concluded from this that:

a) achievement is influenced by a variety of school-related and out-of-school factors,

b) promotion decisions are limited to attempted measures of cognitive performance while educational objectives are much broader. Furthermore there is no guarantee that tests administered provide a valid and reliable criterion to establish the level of knowledge of a pupil or the proportion

TABLE 1

CAUSAL MODEL OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS (W.H. HADDAD 1979)



of pupils that deserve to pass or fail,

c) there is no overwhelming evidence that grade retention is more effective than grade promotion for the low achieving student.

Reasons against retaining students.

William Bock (1977) accuses teachers who attempt to solve a student's academic problems through retention, of lacking the skills, knowledge or desire to individualise their classroom teaching. His personal opinion is that perhaps teachers, administrators and parents are not aware that research conducted over the years has been unable to show, in any consistent way, any benefits of it. Lunden's findings confirm this opinion. The data she obtained from her questionnaire to 5 Principals and 30 teachers, suggested that not only do educators lack the research knowledge on which to properly analyse their promotion/retention decisions, but they are unaware of their own and other's lack of such information (Lunden 1979).

Arguments against grade retention are typically as follows:

1. Retention does not result in significantly greater gains in subject matter mastery than would promotion to the next grade.
2. Retention usually involves recycling a child through an academic program that was inappropriate for him initially and may be equally inappropriate for him the second time around. Seldom is any substantial individual remedial assistance provided for retained students.
3. The stigma of "flunking" a grade is damaging to the social and personal development of low achieving students and could start a snowballing cycle of failure that may extend into his adult life. Failing a grade can be a severe emotional experience for the student in which he could lose self

confidence and initiative. The more times a student is retained in his school career, the lower will be his self concept.

4. Classroom homogeneity in terms of academic skills is not achieved by retention.
5. A teacher using a program of individualised instruction can make provision for every child in her class regardless of his actual level of achievement and stage of development.
6. The best way of grouping children for grade placement is by chronological age. Children tend to achieve better with same age children than with younger or older classmates.
7. Retained students have more adjustment/socialisation difficulties than regularly promoted students.
8. Teachers and peers tend to develop unfavorable attitudes towards retained students.
9. Low grades and subsequent retention may bring unfavorable attitudes from the student's family.
10. Fear of failure and using retention as a threat does not motivate low achieving students to work any harder.
11. In financial terms retention adds to the taxpayers burden.

(Compiled from Light 1977; Miller, Frazier and Richie 1980; Bossing 1980; Eric 1981).

In addition, it appears that retention decisions can be unfair. In each school belonging to the jurisdiction surveyed by Lunden (1979), Principals were apparently differentially influenced by parents, teachers, the community, the Superintendant and the Board of Education. The amount and type of influence

of each of these forces relative to the retention decision, varied according to the community which was served by the school. Dianne Plummer (1982) observed that there is no consistent relationship between the achievement and ability of the students and his/her retention. She says that almost all surveys of student progress reveal cases where children of low achievement have been promoted and children of higher achievement have failed. Additionally, schools with higher average achievement often fail a larger percentage of students than schools with lower average achievement.

Promotion/retention practices and gain in achievement.

C.H. Keyes (1911) was among the first researchers to investigate the effect of promotion practices upon gain in achievement. He studied the achievement of approximately 5,000 repeaters by comparing their performance before being retained with their performance after retention. His analysis revealed that 21% of the pupils did better after repeating, that 39% did worse, and that for 50% retention had no effect (Seldon 1982). Thus for the majority, retention did not result in the anticipated improvement in academic performance. How well these pupils might have performed had they been promoted is open to speculation.

Burnette Buckingham's research sought to answer such a question. In 1926 she reported that the 1918 flu epidemic had badly disorganised the schools of Decatur, Illinois. In order to get the promotion rate back to a normal level, 1,276 pupils who would have failed if normal school promotion policy had been followed were advanced to the next grade (regardless of their failing status) at the close of the first semester of 1918/19. The same practice was followed in June 1919, in December 1919, and in June 1920. In all, a total of 3,141 pupils

were advanced on probation. 56% of the probationary cases showed improved scholarship, 41% showed no change and 3% showed a loss (Whelan 1979). For the majority of these potential repeaters, therefore, promotion improved academic performance. What would retention have done?

B.T. McKinney (1928) studied repeaters in grades above the first, and his finding supported those of C.H. Keyes. McKinney reported that only 35% of these repeaters did better work the second time around. 12% deteriorated in academic performance and the majority, 53%, did not improve at all (Bocks 1977).

In a more experimental study which looked at the differential effects of promotion versus retention, V. Klene and E. P. Branson (1929) matched the mental age, chronological age, I.Q. and grade placement of elementary school students who were expected to repeat a grade, then randomly assigned these students to retention or trial promotion without the knowledge of the students or their parents. An unethical procedure! The experiment lasted for one semester and the students were tested at the beginning and end of that semester. Although the study concluded that the promoted group showed greater academic progress than the repeaters, the findings were not statistically significant (Seldon 1982).

Grace Arthur (1936) attempted to study the effects of promotion and non-promotion on academic achievement. At the end of a two year period, 60 retained first graders were compared with 418 of their peers who had been promoted. The students were matched for mental age on tests administered at the beginning of the first grade and their reading scores were compared after they had completed two years in school. It was found that the retained pupils

learned no more in 2 years than the promoted did in one (Arthur 1936).

In 1936 E. S. Farley also reported an investigation in which a measure of achievement obtained before the promotional decision was used as a base from which to measure subsequent gain. He equated a group of 162 retained students with 193 promoted students in grades two and five on the basis of mental age and chronological age. Gain in achievement in arithmetic and reading was measured by standardised tests administered prior to and five months after the promotional decision. Biserial correlations of the gains made by the two groups revealed that retention was of doubtful value in improving achievement (Worth 1959).

The work of Cook and Kearney (1941) gives added support to this view. These researchers were responsible for another of the few experimental studies done on promotion/retention practices and achievement. In the winter of 1938, Principals in St. Paul, Minnesota identified pupils in Grades 1B through 8A who were expected to fail at half year. Pairs of students in each grade were matched for age, intelligence, achievement and personal traits. One member of each pair was promoted or not; at random. Achievement comparisons were made between the groups in Reading, Arithmetic, and English, with 16 differences favoring the promoted group and 16 favouring the non-promoted group. None of these differences was found to be significant. The authors concluded that the crucial issue appears to be, not whether slow learning students passed or failed, but how adequately their needs were met (Seldon 1982).

In 1941, Carleton Saunders summed up an extensive survey of studies into the effect of retention on school achievement as follows:

> ".....it may be concluded that non-promotion of pupils in elementary schools in order to assure mastery of subject matter does not often accomplish its objective. Children do not appear to learn more by repeating a grade but experience less growth in subject matter achievement than they do when promoted. Therefore a practice of non-promotion because a student does not learn sufficent subject matter in the course of a school year, or for the purpose of learning subject matter, is not justifiable (Goodlad 1954).

Another study that compared pupil achievement before and after promotion and retention was reported by Coeffield and Blommers in 1956. The research compared seventh graders who had failed an elementary school grade with a matched sample who had been regularly promoted. The report concluded that slow learning children who repeated a grade, and slow learning children who are promoted, ultimately perform at about the same level when their achievement is measured at the same higher grade, in spite of the fact that the failed students spent an added year in getting to that grade (Bossing 1980).

In 1956 Edwin A. Reid submitted a thesis entitled "Promotion Policies and Practices in the Schools of Alberta" in partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements at the University of Oregon. After an exhaustive review of the literature on non-promotion, and with the chief reason for all of the 4,389 non-promotions in his study being weakness in certain school subjects, Reid concluded that:

> ".....The values of non-promotion, if indeed there are any have not been discovered in fifty odd years of educational research. There is evidence, though as yet it may be incomplete, which indicates that non-promotion is needless and wasteful at best, and detrimental to human development at worst....." (Worth 1959)

In 1957 Anderson evaluated the differences among promoted, not-promoted and "considered for retention but promoted" pupils a year after

the promotional decision. He concluded that low achievers seem to make the same achievement gains whether they are promoted or not (Worth 1959). Thus his position appears to be in favor of promotion.

W. F. Hall and R. Demerast's 1958 study was a longitudinal examination of the school performance of over 20,000 elementary school children and generated similar results. Records of achievement gathered over a ten year period in the fourth and sixth grades indicated that regular promotion, which kept children with their own age group, did not result in a lowering of academic achievement (Hall and Demerast 1958).

Walter Worth's 1959 study sought to compare the effect of promotion and retention on school achievement of matched groups of third and fourth grade pupils ordinarily categorised as low achievers in the Edmonton, Alberta Public Schools. Two groups of 66 children each, were matched with respect to sex, I.Q., chronological age, achievement tests data and type of school. One group consisted of low achievers promoted to the fourth grade. The other was a group of low achievers who repeated Grade 3. Worth also controlled for teacher experience, training and continuity, pupil attendance, health, home and family conditions and instructional materials and methods. The students were pretested with four standardised tests and post tested by a trained research team. The findings of the study in terms of academic achievement did not support the view that it is improved by retention. Low achieving pupils who are retained appear to make no greater (and often less) gain in achievement than they do when promoted (Worth 1959). Thus Worth's findings did not support retention.

Neither did those of Dobbs and Neville in 1967. These researchers followed the achievement gains of sixty first graders from eight low

socio-economic urban schools for two years of their schooling. Half of the children were retained in the first grade and the other half were promoted to the second grade. The children were matched according to their age, race, sex, socio-economic status, type of classroom assignment, mental ability and reading achievement at the end of their first year in school. Most of the children were slow learners. Dobbs and Neville found that the promoted students made significantly greater gains in reading achievement over the two year period. They concluded that retention may be not only futile, but actually harmful to achievement (Thompson 1980).

Carol Laughlin (1982) was also interested in the effect of retention on reading achievement. A pool of "high risk" students were identified during Metropolitan Readiness testing done in Kindergarten classes. These "high risk" students were those scoring at or below the 23rd percentile. They were tested again two years later when some were in the second grade and some retained in the first grade. Laughlin's study indicated that a significant positive relationship existed between reading achievement and the promoted group.

Ernestine Godfrey reported the results of a 1970 research project by the North Carolina Advancement School. The study involved more than 1,200 students in Grades 6 and 7 from 14 representative schools. The data indicated that retaining the students did not result in helping them "catch-up" academically, and that retained students scored lower on feelings of self worth (as measured on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale) than did those who were not retained (Bocks 1977).

Reinherz and Griffin (1970) attempted to find out what factors contribute to successful retention experiences. Their subjects were 57 primary boys who

were repeating a grade for the first time. All of the boys had at least normal intelligence. It was found that the majority of these students made satisfactory achievement and progress during the retention. Further analysis however, revealed that although over 80% of the first graders made satisfactory achievement, more than half of the second and third grade repeaters showed only fair or poor achievement. This finding, they suggested, supports the common notion that retention is most helpful and least risky early in a child's schooling.

Such notions regarding possible benefits of retention in the early grades has, however, been challenged by other research. Abiden, Golladay and Howerton (1970) did a longitudinal study of elementary grade retention and their findings suggest that retention seems to harm students long after a child has been retained in Grades 1 or 2. Their subjects were 85 children who were retained in either the first or second grade, and 43 children who scored below the 25% on the Metropolitan readiness test but who were never retained. The authors collected their data from school records during the students' sixth grade year. In their first year of schooling the two groups were very much alike. They showed no significant differences in teacher ratings of academic promise, conduct grades, and subject matter grades. Although the subject matter grades of students retained in Grade 1 dropped during the year of repetition, the two groups showed no significant differences in grades during their second and third grade years. Retained second graders showed no difference in grades between their year of repetition and their year of failure. Thus there was no evidence of positive or negative short term effects of retention. But unsettling differences did appear in the later elementary years. During their first 6 grades,

the retained students achievement and ability dropped, (relative to those of the promoted students) so the authors concluded that retained children display a continuing deterioration in both achievement and intelligence through to the 6th grade (Kerzner 1982).

In summary these studies suggest that as a rule retention of low achieving students is less desirable than automatic promotion. Retention does not seem to guarantee improved academic performance, in fact it has even been described as being detrimental to improvement. In instances where some improvement did occur, it seemed to be more beneficial to students in the early grades, but conflicting findings question the duration of such improvement. Gradual, continuing deterioration in achievement through to Grade 6 of students retained in Grades 1 and 2 suggests that retention could harm a child long after it actually occurred.

In contrast to these findings, however, other studies indicate that retention exerts a beneficial effect on academic achievement. For example, Charles Allison (1959) looked at Grade 7 repeaters in the Edmonton Public School system in terms of their scholastic history prior to failure and their subsequent scholastic record after failure. His results indicated that 70% of the pupils who repeated Grade 7 did better work during the year of repetition. This seems to suggest that repeating a grade was worthwile for the majority. However, most of those students doing better work the second time around received only minimum passing grades.

Similar findings were generated by Gaite's study. He also considered adolescents in Junior High School grades to determine if retention improved their grades in all subjects. The study was essentially a version of Keyes's

research in 1911. Student marks were analysed in all subject matter areas, both prior to retention and at the end of the repeated year. Although Gaite found statistically significant differences in academic achievement in some subjects, he questioned teacher bias in allocating the marks after the repeated year, and he concluded that the amount of academic growth the second time around was not justified by the amount of extra time spend in the grade (Gaite 1969).

Support for retaining students deemed "immature" comes from Scott and Ames (1969) who studied 27 Elementary students who were retained in various grades, mostly primary ones. The authors included in their study only children whose retention had been determined solely on the basis of immaturity. All children had an intelligence quotient of at least 90. The authors argued that many previous studies had found the retention experience unprofitable because they had uncritically included all failed children in their samples. It should be expected, they noted that retention cannot remedy the problems of low ability and emotionally disturbed children. Scott and Ames found that retention seemed to help their immature students' academic performance and behavior. All the children showed significant improvement in their class grades and teachers rated the adjustment of 90% of the students as average, high or very high. Parents also reported significant improvement in their children's social, emotional and academic adjustment. The authors concluded that retention is the solution for children who are too immature for their grade and need time to develop.

Thompson (1977) reported the results of a mini survey among a group of primary teachers who had retained students for reasons of immaturity. They estimated that over 80% of those who had repeated were helped academically.

No teacher felt that any child was severely damaged. Furthermore they indicated that retained students developed better self-concepts through success found during the second year in the grade. The teachers felt more children were damaged by floundering in a grade for which they were not ready. A survey of the students themselves revealed that they felt good about themselves, and either the same or better about their schoolwork than they had the year before.

Susan Van Zant's study supports early retention. She looked at the impact of retention upon academic achievement, self-concept and classroom behaviour. The results of her investigation revealed that first grade students retained in the 80/81 school year had signficantly higher scores in reading and math than their non retained grade mates. However, third and fifth grade reading and math scores of retained students were significantly lower than those of their promoted grade mates (Van Zant 1982).

Randi Kerzner (1982) also agrees with early retention. He investigated the educational value of retaining low achieving elementary school students in the same grade for an additional year. Subjects were 56 students who had completed at least one grade level beyond the grade in which they had been retained. The students had each been tested with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills during the year of retention and during the following year. Results showed that retention was beneficial academically to students in all grades, but that retaining a child in Grades 1, 2, and 3 was more beneficial than later retention.

Ben Oldham (1982) looked at the longitudinal effects of pupil retention practices in the first three grades. He matched groups of retained and

promoted students on academic ability, gender and school entry age. The findings of his study indicated that students of average academic ability who had been retained one or more times in the primary grades achieved significantly higher in Math throughout their school careers than comparable routinely promoted students. Other findings however showed that in terms of reading achievement there was no longitudinal difference between retained and comparable routinely promoted students.

However, Deanne Gerstel (1981) presented findings to challenge this. In her investigation of non-promotion and its effect on reading achievement she selected 20 students at random from each of Grades 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 who were retained during the 1979/80 school year. Statistical findings were that there was a significant difference in the reading growth of retained students in these grades. There were also signficant differences in the reading growth of retained students across the grade levels 2 to 6.

In conclusion, with reference to the 26 studies mentioned thus far, done between 1911 and 1982 concerning promotion/retention practices and gain in achievement, most do not support its efficacy in remedying the academic problems of low achieving students. Only eight support it. Of these, three recommend early retention in Grades 1 to 3 as opposed to later; two specify retention for reasons of immaturity; one indicates a relationship between retention and improvement in Math and one indicates a relationship between retention and improvement in reading skills. There is not an overwhelming amount of evidence demonstrating the value of retention at the Elementary level. Only two studies address this concern at the Junior High School level. In both, improvement in marks was noted, but the actual degree of improvement

seemed hardly sufficient to justify an investment of a whole year's extra work.

Promotion/retention practices and attitude towards school.

Investigations in this area have dealt with pupils' attitudes towards school work, work habits and effort. The findings reported have largely been based upon information gathered from questionnaires or rating scales, completed by pupils and teachers under relatively uncontrolled experimental conditions. Most of the few studies done are out of date.

H.J. Otto (1936) claimed that non-promotion seldom improves students interest and application.

E.S. Farley (1936) sought to determine the cumulative effects of repeated retention on student effort. His subjects were over 3,000 children in Grades 5 and 6. Over 40% had failed at least once and 17% had failed three or more times. Farley's findings led him to conclude that repeated failure defeats its purpose, for rather than encouraging effort it discourages it.

A California study by Russell, Alexander, Skellhammer and Smitter provided opportunities for both regularly promoted and retained students in Grades 5 to 8 to express their attitudes towards school attendance, teachers, pupils and grade repetition. It was found that retained students had more negative attitudes towards school then did their regularly promoted classmates (Worth 1959).

In 1955, W.C. Huddleston studied the work habits of retained students. He found them dependant on others, easily distracted and only sporadically interested in their work.

A much more recent study by Ben Oldham (1982) looked at the longitudinal effects of retention in the first three grades. In terms of attitude

towards school, there were no statistically significant differences at the Grade 2 level between students who had been retained one or more times in the primary grades and comparable students who had been routinely promoted.

In summary, few studies have been done regarding promotion/retention decisions and attitude towards school (including changes in work habits and effort). Four of the five studies in this section are dated but their finding suggest a relationship between retained students and negative attitudes towards school, poor work habits and lack of effort. Non-promoted grade 2 students in one study did not however display such characteristics. Whether or not Junior High School students do, has not been investigated.

Promotion/retention practices and social/personal development.

Rudolph Anfinson (1941) was one of the first researchers to indicate interest in the effects of retention on pupil adjustment as well as pupil achievement. He studied 116 pairs of Junior High School students who were matched on school attendance, chronological age, sex, intelligence and social status. One of each pair has been regularly promoted while the other had repeated a grade in elementary school (interestingly, the greatest amount of failure had occurred in Grade 1). Anfinson found that the regularly promoted students were significantly better in their social and personal adjustment.

Adolph Sandin (1944) studied the social, behavioural and emotional results of retention through the use of tests, rating scales, observations and interviews. He found that the retained child on the average was likely to choose companions in the grades ahead and would like to join them there. The retained children tended to regard their younger classmates as inappropriate companions. They did not often receive the social approval or acceptance of

the regularly promoted. Other children were inclined to describe the slow progress children as more likely to be unhappy, grouchy, quarrelsome, rude and selfish. This study suggests that peer relationships can have a strong influence on a child's adjustment to school. If retained children are (or perceive themselves to be) the target of discrimination in their new classes then the academic problems associated with retention might be compounded and self-evaluation may suffer further.

John Goodlad was one of the most vocal oppontents of the practice of non-promotion. He attempted to throw some light on questions raised by Sandin. In his study at the University of Chicago in 1949 he matched a group of 55 promoted second grade pupils with a group of 55 retained first grade pupils on the basis of chronological age, mental age, and achievement. The purpose of Goodlad's study was to determine whether or not differences in social and personal adjustment existed between two groups of promoted and non-promoted children. The California Test of personality (Primary) and socio-metric "best-friend" questions were administered to both groups at the beginning and end of the school year, to test two major null hypotheses: 1) that there are no differences in social adjustments between school children who repeat grades and those who do not and 2) that there are no differences in personal adjustments between school children who repeat grades and those who do not. Goodlad found twenty-nine instances of significant differences on the instrument used, and thus the two hypotheses were rejected. Eighteen of the significant differences favored the promoted group, and eight favored the retained group. The remaining three instances were not clearly to the

advantage of either group. The bulk of those differences favoring the promoted group had to do with peer-group relationships. The promoted children tended to be more accepted as friends, and less rejected as persons not considered desirable as friends, with the reverse holding true for the retained children. The whole picture of socio-metric change over the school year was one of decline in desirable adjustment for retained children and improvement for promoted children. These findings led Goodlad to state that:

> "The total body of evidence suggests the closer affiliation of undesirable social and personal adjustment characteristics with non-promotion than with promotion. Although the exact causal nature of this affiliation cannot be ascertained with finality, there are clear indications that non-promotion is the less defensible educational practice.
> (Goodlad 1954)

Goodlad emphasises that it is important a child get along with his peers, that his teacher accept him at a level common to other children and that he be sure within himself that his status is equivalent to that of his classmates.

Caswell and Foshay agree with Goodlad that repeating has a negative effect on personal adjustment, since they found that it often results in the student's learning to distrust his own ability, becoming discouraged and depressed and ultimately learning to expect failure (Chase 1972).

Ida E. Morrison and Perry (1956) also supported Goodlad's findings that pupils above the typical age in classes were perceived as less popular than their regularly promoted peers. In their studies, students were asked to complete socio-metric questionnaires. In one study, students were asked to choose three friends each, for play, for committee work and for a party at home. In the second study, students were asked to identify one student with whom they would like to sit. Ranked lists of students based on the number of times they

were chosen were created for each study. The lists were divided into quarters, by class, with the highest quarter designated as first and the lowest as fourth. Thus the authors were able to determine the socio-metric status of the older students in each class as indicated by the quarter in which they were found. In Morrison's study, 86% of the students above the typical age were found below the socio-metric median for their class; Perry reported that 90% of the older pupils were below this median. The authors concluded that students above the normal age in grade, had, as a group, little chance for social acceptance and that non-promotion had negative social consequences for them (Seldon 1982).

Morrison and Perry found that discrimination against overage children varied considerably at different age levels but was most severe in Grades 4, 5 and 6. In general, a definite degree of non-acceptance for overage children was found in their study (Bocks 1977).

Walter Worth's Edmonton study (1959) evaluated the social-personal development of matched promoted and non-promoted 3rd and 4th graders on the basis of teacher responses to a questionnaire, and peer choice. His findings ran counter to those reported in the bulk of the previous research on this problem, in that retention did not appear to have an adverse effect on the social-personal development of low achievers. On the contrary, low achievers who were retained tended to be rated as high or higher on personality traits, and to be accorded the same, and sometimes better, socio-metric status than those who were promoted. Worth interpreted these findings as indicating the possibility that the greater gain in achievement may have been at the expense of their social-personal development (Worth 1959).

In terms of personal adjustment a study by Finlayson (1977) questioned the belief that retention fosters low self-concept. His two year study followed first graders from the onset of their schooling through their second year. Finlayson compared the self-concepts of 75 regularly promoted students, retained students and promoted borderline students (who showed the same characteristics as the retained students) having predicted that the self concept of the non-promoted children would become significantly more negative than either of the other two groups. This did not occur. The resulting self concept scores of the three groups did not support the major hypothesis of the study.

In view of Finlayson's findings that retention did not create self-concept problems with first graders, and White and Howard's findings linking retention and low self-concept in sixth graders, it is possible that self-concept issues are of greater concern in students as they grow older and are retained in grades beyond Elementary school.

Self concept is a difficult entity to define. During early and middle adolescence, however, it is largely based on cues that emanate from external sources (Twiford and Carson 1980). Social interactions serve as an important testing ground and source of feedback that critically affect self-concept development and emotional well-being.

In connection with the social, the emotional and the academic, Reinherz and Griffin (1970) found that emotional and social well being were definitely linked with satisfactory school progress. Students showing good social and emotional adjustment and students having good peer relationships usually made good academic progress. Conversely, Kenneth Green's research indicated that

children who were high on academic achievement were more accepted and less rejected and disliked by peers, and engaged in more positive interactions with peers than those low on achievement. Generally, children who perform well academically are likely to be popular and sociable. Thus the importance of both achievement and social well-being to each other is obvious. Hence the focus on both in this study.

In summary, from the eleven studies mentioned in this section dealing with promotion/retention practices and social/personal development, most of the evidence suggests that regularly promoted elementary school students fare better their social adjustment and are more accepted by their classmates as friends than retained children. The latter have been shown to experience discrimination by their younger classmates and a decline in social adjustment over the course of the year. Self concept problems, possibly due to deteriorating social relationships could evolve, perhaps depending on the age of the student and grade level of retention.

Gains and losses in terms of the social and the academic are questioned by Greg Jackson (1975) .....

> "...it is not clear that the alleged benefits of retention (academic improvement) generally outweigh the possible harm caused by the disruption of the student's friendships caused by the enforced separation from his or her former classmates..."

It is possible that this might be more of a concern at the Junior High School level because of the importance to the pre-adolescent of his peers.

Characteristics of Junior High School students.

"Possible harm caused by ... separation from his or her former classmates" might be more intense for Junior High School students than for elementary

students because peer group conformity tends to be at its strongest during early adolescence, especially the years from twelve to fourteen. Adolescents value their friends for the understanding and support they provide (Newman 1979). How they are seen by their peers can be the most important aspect of their lives to the point that some adolescents will go along with almost anything just to be included as a member of the group. They are very concerned about being different and do not want to be singled out in a crowd (Ingersoll 1982). To them, to be excluded, means frustration, sadness and stress (Santrock 1981).

The quality of peer relationships is a sensitive predictor of both future and current adjustment (Johnson 1980). Stanley Deno says that peer interactions are critical for normal development. There is evidence that a child without friends is "at risk", he is more likely to drop out of school, have major incidences of metal health problems and more likely to engage in juvenile delinquency (Deno 1980). While retention may not leave an adolescent totally bereft of friends, "flunking a grade" may be a social disruption precipitating loneliness due to the loss of former social contacts and the need to form new relationships with new younger classmates. Brennan and Auslander (1979) analysed data from four separate studies using a sample of 9,000 adolescents from ten U.S. cities and found that serious levels of loneliness were associated with (amongst other factors), failure and rejection (Goldenberg 1981).

John Mitchell (1975) says that few youth can escape the deep psychic pain which is the result of group rejection and ridicule. "Deep psychic pain" could occur as a result of being retained in a class of younger students.

Bossing and Brien suggest that forcing students to identify with a class of younger children (which occurs as a result of retention) may produce long lasting negative consequences. Such students may develop negative attitudes. They may begin to feel inadequate and inferior. They may withdraw and become depressed. Retention could be a devastating experience from which they never recover. (Bossing and Brien 1980). It could induce a high level of stress.

Rosalee Yeaworth et al (1980) investigated how 207 adolescents aged 11 to 18 rated life change events and amount of stress created by them. The subjects rated 31 personal, social and family changes on a scale of 1 to 5 according to how upsetting they perceived each to be. "Flunking a grade in school" ranked quite high - seventh out of thirty-one, indicating it represented a high stress item for adolescents. Had the subjects all experienced this event they might have rated it even higher.

According to Professor K. Yamamoto in his 1980 study, academic retainment creates as much stress in the life of a middle school student as going blind, or losing a parent (Purkeson and Whitfield 1980).

In summary, it appears that the picture of retention at the Junior High Scool level might not be very bright. It seems it could possibly result in a deterioration in peer relationships which could in turn produce serious emotional consequences. Thus retention at this level as observations suggest, might not be conducive to the "...mental and social well-being" that is supposedly fostered in Alberta schools. Furthermore, ability to learn could be affected as a result. Yet retention occurs at this level despite some evidence arguing that early retention is more beneficial.

Timing

Goodlad says that it is important to attack the promotion/retention problem as early as possible in the school life of the child. Similarly, in discussing grade placement Louise Bates Ames (1980) says about retention "....if it must be done, the sooner the better". Other researchers concur. Laurence Lieberman states that a resonable rule of thumb suggested by research is that retention presents a valuable programmatic option for Kindergarten through second grade. Third grade is regarded as pivotal. Fourth grade and beyond is usually frowned upon. Students retained beyond fourth grade are usually the victims of inappropriate disciplinary action, or lack of special educational services, or both. Thus it might follow that retention at the Junior High School level is an inappropriately late remedy for low achievement.

William Glasser (1969) says that the age beyond which failure is difficult to reverse is 10. "Shortly after age 10 he is thrust into a Junior High School situation where he has much less change for a corrective educational experience." In discussing failure Glasser stresses that students who feel they are failures behave as failures to solidify their identities as failures. Failure he believes is self-perpetuating. With particular reference to the adolescent, Glasser says that once he/she accepts the failure identify, it is difficult to change or modify. It is interesting that most students refer to retention as "failure".

Conclusions.

Other researchers have reviewed findings concerning the promotion/retention issue and report conflicting conclusions. Robert Reiter (1973) concludes that grade retention appears futile because it ensures neither more

achievement nor better social/emotional adjustment than does social promotion. He says retention usually damages student motivation and its damaging effects appear to be long term and self-perpetuating.

William Walker (1973) writes that the evidence fails to support a policy of forced retention. He says that students in general do not learn more when repeating a grade and often learn less. The problems of retention appear to be long term, for retained students never achieve up to par throughout their schooling. Poor self-concept linked with low achievement appears to be aggravated by retention. Non-promotion also seems to foster negative attitudes towards school.

William M. Bock (1977) gives a concise and forceful summary of research findings on retention. Bock concludes that the evidence clearly shows retention brings no benefit to children, but often brings harm. He believes it fails to ensure greater achievement, because the majority of students who repeat achieve no better the second time around, and many in fact do worse. He also believes that retention worsens students' social problems. Bock concludes his report with the following opinion:

> "..... common sense and the desire for humane treatment of youngsters suggest that our classrooms must adjust to the needs of the child. It does not appear possible to equally prepare all children for a given grade ..... children do have to be given "time to grow". Research on non-promotion suggests that they can grow even better in classes with their own age-mates."
>
> Bock 1977

Whelan (1979) concurs. He says that over the history of promotion and non-promotion it appears that retention does not significantly increase achievement and in a certain percentage of cases even retards learning. Also,

non-promotion does not appear to improve student social and personal adjustment sufficiently to render it a worthwhile practice.

On the other hand, "accountability" is a current issue, and has brought renewed focus by some educators on "educational standards" to assure the public that their tax dollars are buying high quality programs and competant teachers. Likewise, the back-to-the-basics point of view, emphasizes minimum competancy standards. It has brought renewed vigor on the part of those who favor retention, with some educators insisting that students must master basic fundamentals prior to promotion. For instance, Professor W.D. Valgardson (1982) writes in exasperation about University students brandishing A's and B's from High School English classes yet being unable to write a simple sentence correctly. He says:

> "I have had to deal with individuals who lacked basic knowledge, although they had high grades from school. Their vocabularies were miniscule and their understanding of the derivation of words non existant."

He appears to blame this lack of competance on social promotion. He explains how learning in basic skill subjects is sequential and recommends that students repeat simple work before being allowed to advance to more complex work.

Despite the importance to the individual of broad educational objectives emphasizing social, emotional and cognitive development it cannot be denied that the maintenance of academic standards are valid educational concerns.

In terms of low achieving students, however, whether this low achievement is remedied or aggravated by either grade retention or automatic promotion remains a contentious issue.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Setting.

The study was conducted in four schools in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 (P.S.S.D. #6). St. Albert is situated approximately five miles northwest of the City of Edmonton, Alberta. Primarily a dormitory community it has a population of 35,000 of which over 25% are school age children. The P.S.S.D. #6 enrols over 5,400 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in eleven schools. The four of these involved in this study were:

1. Sir George Simpson Junior High School (catering to grades 7-9)
2. Lorne Akins Junior High School (catering to grades 7-9)
3. William D. Cuts Elementary/Junior High (catering to grades 4-9)
4. Elmer S. Gish Elementary/Junior High (catering to grades 4-9)

Population.

Subjects for the study consisted of all the students currently repeating Grade 7, Grade 8 and Grade 9 in the summer of 1984, attending the above schools. This population of repeating students across the four schools numbered 20. Of these, 10 were males and 10 were females. Their ages ranged from 13 to 16 years. Breakdown of subjects into numbers and percentages by grade and school is documented in Table 2.

Administrative procedures.

A general orientation meeting was conducted at each school to enable the examiner to make initial contact with the potential subjects, to explain

TABLE 2

Numbers and percentages of repeating students by grade and by school.

	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Totals by school
Sir George Simpson Junior High School	2 (1.7%)	1 (.8%)	1 (.8%)	4 (1.4%)
Lorne Akins Junior High School	5 (3.3%)	2 (1.2%)	3 (1.8%)	10 (2%)
W.D. Cuts Elementary/ Junior High School	3 (2.7%)	1 (.9%)	0	4 (1.2%)
Elmer S. Gish Elementary/ Junior High School	1 (1.7%)	1 (2.6%)	0	2 (1.3%)
Totals by grade	11 (2.5%)	5 (1.2%)	4 (.9%)	20 (1.5%)

her interest in the practice of retention and to describe the purpose of the proposed study. Instrumentation and possible scheduling of data collection were discussed. Indications of support for the study and willingness to participate were received from all 20 students. Each was subsequently given a letter to take home to parents, briefly describing the study; indicating amount of out-of-class time involved and requesting permission for the student to participate. A copy of this letter is located in Appendix A-1. Letters were also sent to members of staff at each school requesting out-of-class time for each student at specified times convenient to all parties concerned. A copy of this letter is located in Appendix A-2. Data were subsequently collected during May and June 1984, on a one-to-one basis with each subject, by means of a 15 to 30 minute interview recorded on audio-tape, and completion of a questionnaire. Following each session, the duration of which averaged approximately 45 minutes, each student was asked to divulge the name of a teacher who had taught him/her, or had had contact with him/her during both years in the grade. Each teacher selected was subsequently contacted and asked to complete a simple questionnaire regarding perceptions of retention, both in general and in regard to the student concerned. Out of 16 teachers nominated (4 students had not encountered the same teacher two years in a row) 13 replied.

Finally, in July, year end marks obtained by each student for both years in the grade (1983 and 1984), in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies, were collected from student records.

Instrumentation.

The data utilised in this study were recorded by means of four different types of instruments:

1. Individual audiotapes.

A 15 to 30 minute interview was conducted with each subject and recorded on audiotape. The intention of this interview was to establish rapport with the subject and encourage him/her to share thoughts, attitudes, feelings and opinions regarding different aspects of the retention experience. A variety of open-ended questions were asked. These are located in Appendix B. Student responses were accepted non-judgementally by the examiner. Elaboration was encouraged but only information pertinent to repetition was utilised in this study.

2. Student questionnaire.

A questionnaire was developed, influenced by items in the Mooney Problem Checklist, to obtain data from each student regarding the following:

- their perceptions of the effects of retention on their academic performance as indicated by ratings on a scale ranging from 1 (much worse than last year) to 5 (much better than last year) comparing the two years in the grade in terms of academic performance in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies (25 items),
- their perceptions regarding the effects of retention on attitude towards school as indicated by their ratings on a 1 to 5 scale (much worse to much better) comparing the two years in this respect (14 items),
- their perceptions of the effects of retention on peer relationships as indicated by their ratings on a 1 to 5 scale (much less to much more) comparing the two years in the grade in terms of peer relationships (32 items).

Incomplete sentences were also included in the questionnaire regarding perceived advantages and disadvantage of repeating the grade in terms of school work and friendships.

The questionnaire is located in Appendix C-1.

3. Student records.

Student records were utilised in order that year-end marks in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies obtained in June 1983 and June 1984 be collected. This information was tabulated in order that comparisons be made in terms of actual degree of academic improvement (if any).

4. Teacher questionnaire.

This questionnaire, located in Appendix C-2, requested that each teacher rate his/her perceptions of:

- changes in a particular student's academic achievement on a scale ranging from 1 (much worse than last year) to 5 (much better than last year),
- changes in that student's attitude towards school on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 as above,
- changes in that student's attitude towards teachers on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 as above,
- changes in a student's relationships with classmates on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 as above,

In addition comments were requested regarding the above aspects of retention and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of repeating in terms of student attitude, achievement and peer relationships. Information was

sought regarding the following:

- special provision (if any) made for repeating students over and above the regular programme in each subject area,
- teacher attitude towards repetition in general,
- teacher suggestions for alternatives to this practice,

Analysis of data.

1. A six stage thematic analysis was conducted upon data collected through interviews and written incomplete sentences (located in the student questionnaire). Such analysis is based on the phenomenological methods of Colaizzi (1979). The six stages utilised were:
   - transcribing the taped interviews and writings,
   - extracting significant statements directly pertaining to the investigated phenomena,
   - establishing intended meanings of these significant statements,
   - formulating the intended meanings of the statements into subthemes,
   - grouping the subthemes into central themes then validating the central themes by referring them back to the original transcriptions,
   - organising a phenomenological description around each of the central themes and illuminating them with varying examples.
2. In terms of data obtained from the three different rating scales on the questionnaire, tallies from the 71 items were converted into appropriately categorised frequency tables as follows:

- perceptions of changes in overall academic performance between the two years,
- perceptions of changes in Language Arts by those students who failed it,
- perceptions of changes in Language Arts by those students who did not fail it,
- perceptions of Math by those students who failed it,
- perceptions of Math by those students who did not fail it,
- perceptions of Science by those students who failed it,
- perceptions of Science by those students who did not fail it,
- perceptions of Social Studies by those students who failed it,
- perceptions of Social Studies by those students who did not fail it,
- perceptions of changes in attitude towards school and teachers,
- perceptions of treatment of peers this year compared with last year,
- perceptions of treatment by peers this year compared with last year,

3. Actual marks located in students' records obtained in June, 1983 and June, 1984 in Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies, were tabulated for comparison. In order to calculate averages each letter was allocated points as follows:

   A = 12; A- = 11; B+ = 10; B = 9; B- = 8; C+ = 7; C = 6; C- = 5; D+ = 4; D = 3; D- = 2; F = 1

These points were then used to develop a matrix from which the difference between year end marks was calculated. Points difference between marks allocated in June 1983 and June 1984 for each student was then tabulated for discussion.

4. In terms of the teacher questionnaire, data obtained from teachers' ratings of changes in students' academic achievement, attitude towards school and teachers, and peer relationships were converted into a frequency table. Furthermore, the six stage thematic analysis referred to in 1. above was conducted upon teachers' written comments. Descriptions were finally organised around each central theme, and appropriate information from the above mentioned frequency table was incorporated therein.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction.

Analyses of the data were carried out as described in Chapter III. In terms of the student interviews, approximately ten hours of recorded audiotapes were typed into seventy pages of transcripts. (An example of a transcript from one interview is located in Appendix D.) From these transcripts, 441 significant statements relating to the investigated phenomena were extracted. Furthermore, 72 significant statements from open ended questions in the student questionnaire were added to these, and the total amount of 513 significant statements relating to different aspects of the retention experience were typed into 25 pages of phenomenological data. Intended meanings of these significant statements were then established - 229 were generated. These were subsequently grouped into 36 subthemes, which were in turn categorised into 18 appropriate central themes corresponding to the original questions asked in the interview. Central themes, subthemes and intended meanings were then tabulated for easy reference. Examples of this organization of interview data is located in Appendix E-1, E-2 and E-3. Finally, a phenomenological description was organised around each central theme, each being illuminated with varying relevant examples from the original statements made by the students in this study. These are located in Section 1 of this Chapter on page 47.

Data from the 71 items constituting the three rating scales in the student questionnaire were converted into 11 frequency tables (see Table 3 through to

Table 13). A discussion of this data is located in Section 2 of this Chapter on page 72.

Actual marks obtained by students in June, 1983 and June, 1984 were tabulated for comparison (Table 14). Marks were then allocated points, thus enabling points difference between them to be considered (Table 15). Percentages of students achieving differing degrees of change in marks were then tabulated (Table 17). A discussion of this data is located in Section 3 of this Chapter on page 89.

The four items rated by the 13 teachers in relation to their observations of repeating students were recorded on a frequency table (Table 19). The six stage thematic analysis described in Chapter III was conducted upon teachers' written comments and generated 42 intended meanings of significant statements, 12 subthemes and 6 central themes. This data was organised in a similar manner to data from student interviews and is located in Appendix E-4. Descriptive paragraphs, incorporating data from Table 19 were organised around these 6 central themes, and are located in Section 4 of this Chapter on page 95.

1. Findings from student interviews.

Reasons for the retention. The reasons stated were mainly negative ones. The majority of students (90%) cited failing marks in two or more subjects as the main reason for having to repeat, plus a combination of other reasons. The most frequently quoted secondary reasons were those placing responsibility for progress on the student himself. They were as follows:

"I didn't try hard enough."
"I had a poor attitude towards school."
"I hadn't completed all of the work this year."

Blaming others occurred in very few instances. Thus locus of control for one's circumstances seemed to be internal.

Other reasons for repeating quoted by lesser numbers of students were; concern about problems at home; inappropriate behaviour at school; perceiving self as not smart enough; lengthy absences due to illness; immaturity. Only three students (15%) stated reasons for repeating in positive terms. These were; an opportunity for academic improvement; a second chance; and an opportunity to capitalise on perceived potential to learn (that had not been utilised last year). Paradoxically, the student to whom the latter applied was the most hostile about having to repeat. It appeared that the majority of the students perceived repetition in a negative light. This writer steadfastly and deliberately used the words "repeating" and "retention" throughout all interviews, yet nineteen out of the twenty students spontaneously referred to the experience as "failure". For the majority of students it seemed to be regarded as a punishment rather than an opportunity. One student, however, spontaneously addressed the issue as follows:

> "Repeating isn't failing. I don't look at it that way. I view last year as failing. This year I think positively. Okay, I failed last year, who cares? That's behind me now. Like.....so many kids who fail dwell on it. Like "I failed, I failed, I failed". They don't even try to change anything. I say to them "Don't think about it. So you failed. Who cares? Try and improve yourself."

She was the only student in the group who expressed such feelings.

Initial impact of the retention decision. The majority of the students appeared to have reacted negatively when it was formally communicated to them that they were required to repeat the grade. Anger was one of the most frequently

quoted responses. The most hostile student in the group directed his anger towards the Principal:

> "....I felt terrible....I felt like killing her....I was so angry!"

Some students were angry at the situation; that it would cause them to lose face, that it would forcibly separate them from their friends and the friendships would be lost. Others were angry at themselves, for not performing better during the year. Depression, which has been described as "anger turned inwards" was another oft-cited response to the retention decision. "Crying", "feeling upset" and "being sad" were common reactions. The duration of these feelings appeared to range from two weeks to two months. It seemed that those who did not expect to have to repeat reacted more intensely. For example:

> "It was a real shock when I found out I had failed. I was on holidays at the time and I phoned my mom and she told me. I just started crying and couldn't stop. It was during the summer holidays. I felt so bad, so depressed. Like I thought I had done OK. My marks throughout the year had been around 50, so I thought they would be pass marks...."

Conversely, those who had entertained the possibility of retention seemed to handle it better:

> "I never felt nothing about failing because I expected it...."
>
> "I wasn't too surprised about it....it didn't really bother me because I thought I might fail...."

Anticipation, however, didn't guarantee acceptance:

> "Even though I had a say in the decision, and agreed to it, I felt angry a few times just thinking about it. Leaving all my friends...."

Other feelings towards the decision were: regret (for not working harder); blaming others and self; frustration (that plans for next year would be thwarted); worthlessness and low self esteem (feeling useless); apprehension (about adapting to the new situations); disappointment (due to own lack of achievement); dissatisfaction (that input from self and parents was not sought during the decision making process); discouragement ("....I said to my mom, I'm never going to school again!"); disillusionment ("....it made me uspet when they told me I wasn't trying hard enough - I thought I was"); and adoption of failure identity ("I felt like a failure").

Overall, the majority of the students initially demonstrated negative reactions to the retention decision.

Current attitude towards the decision. Most of the students were able to separate the affective from the cognitive. They were able to see beyond their negative feelings and make an objective, retrospective judgement about the retention decision, accepting responsibility for the necessity of it. The following statement encapsulates the prevalent attitude:

"....like....it still makes me mad, but I guess I deserved it...."

Most of the students viewed the decision as "fair", as appropriate retribution for: failing marks; lack of effort; inappropriate behaviour; lengthy absences; incompletion of required work; poor study skills; immaturity; poor attitude towards school work and lack of prerequisite skills for the more advanced work in the next grade.

One student's rationalization about his retention could perhaps provide a different angle to the speculation of some students that "almost failing" would

provide sufficient motivation to improve effort in the next higher grade.

> "It was fair (that I should repeat) because really I should have repeated the last grade but they just placed me in this grade and thought I'd work harder but it didn't work out that way. So I guess they had to fail me this time...."

Only five students regarded the decision as unfair, as inappropriate retribution for anything, because of other considerations, particularly permanent separation from friends. A Grade 9 student who had excitedly anticipated passing on to High School felt her plans were thwarted, hence she perceived the decision as unfair. Being singled out from classmates and allocated the special treatment of retention also seemed to render the decision unjust.

> "It was unfair because every single solitary person in my class except for me went on...."

Likewise, comparison with the lesser achievement of others and perceived preferential treatment of them seemed to render the decision unfair:

> "I feel it was very unfair because there's this girl in my class and I was getting higher marks than her and they passed her and kept me back. The teachers thought she was a hopeless case 'cause she didn't learn anything no matter what they did, so they though it would be a waste of their time to keep her in Grade 8 so they passed her on. It's not fair."

Overall, however, the majority of the students seemed to perceive the retention decision as "deserved", despite their feelings about it.

Retained students' emotional reactions in September 1983. When asked to recollect their first days as a repeater when they returned to the same grade in September, 1983, unpleasant memories were aroused in the majority of

students. Emotional reactions at that time seemed to polarise, with the weighting being more negative than positive. Embarrassment was the most common reaction: about losing face ("I felt embarrassed to tell them I had failed"); about being verbally harassed ("....everybody suddenly knew....they all started bugging me - yeah stupid! you failed!....embarrassing!"); about being labelled ("They didn't call me "dummy" but that's what they were thinking."); and about being noticed ("I didn't want everybody to see I had failed."). Feeling "different" was a common reaction; different in terms of being older, more mature, more experienced and this appeared to lead to feelings of not belonging, one of Maslow's basic needs. Some students imposed negative perceptions of self upon others ("....they must have been thinking "What a stupid person"....") indicating their own low self esteem. Difficulty in making friends appeared to be a problem for some, precipitating feelings of loneliness, and fear of being rejected by already established friendships groups in class. One student reacted to this with distaste:

> "When I saw all those young kids in my class I felt like throwing up. Yuk!! I thought to myself."

Some students experienced depression because of enforced separation from promoted peers, and boredom with the work was mentioned several times. Few students associated positive emotions with memories of September 1983. Of these, one student appeared to feel comfortable with her new classmates because she had interacted with them before and was familiar with them. Another student displayed acceptance of the situation:

> "It really didn't bother me at all in September."

One student had physically and mentally removed herself from the whole situation over the summer and returned viewing repeating from a different perspective. She felt enthusiastic and enouraged:

> "My mom sent me to South America for a vacation last summer, and when I came back I was "full of pep" and ready for school."

Overall, however, the majority of students recalled painful memories of their first days as a repeater.

Coping behaviours in September 1983. All the students devised strategies to help them handle a situation generally perceived as undesirable and unpleasant, and there was evidence of as many positive ploys being utilised, as negative. In terms of the latter, some students used withdrawl as a defence mechanism:

> "I kept myself to myself."
> "I just sat there and did nothing. I just sat."

Others avoided threatening situations, and procrastinated:

> "I looked inside the class....and I said to myself "I'm not going in there" and so I just kept on walking. I just couldn't do it. I was too embarrassed to walk into it."

One student protected himself by using cover-up tactics:

> "At the start of the year I'd always hide my textbooks so my friends wouldn't see me carrying Grade 7 ones and make fun of that."

Physical hostility and aggressive retaliatory comments were employed by other students:

> "I make life very unpleasant for the immature Grade 7's."

> "This guy from school goes to me "Aah you failure!" and I just looked at him and said "Just go and fuck off".

One student, renowned for aggressiveness, found refuge behind his reputation:

> "See, I have this established tough guy image. Nobody talks meanly to me. They leave me alone because of my reputation. I like that."

At the other end of the spectrum, however, were those who employed more positive kinds of strategies to deal with different aspects of repeating. For example: ignoring ridicule and derision; actively making gestures of friendship; and identifying with peers of the same size, or same age, or with the same interests or in the same situation of having to repeat. A few students utilised the power of positive thinking. For example:

> "Like during Social I always think to myself, "Well I sure am glad to be in Grade 7 because it would be a lot harder for me in Grade 8."
>
> "I don't care how young or old they are, it's how they act that counts."
>
> "....so I thought I had better make the best of things."

A couple of students employed self evaluation and voluntarily changed their own behaviour in order to improve their circumstances:

> "Last year I'd always get into trouble so this year no one would get involved with me. So I just quit behaving like that."
>
> "I acted big a couple of times but then I stopped it because it didn't do me no good."

Rationalization of the situation ("See, this is really the grade I would have been in if I hadn't got put into school early in Grade 1.") and compensatory action ("They (promoted peers) ignored me like I was a nobody. But that's okay

because I just made new friends.") helped others adjust to their new grade. One girl, much older than her current classmates because of having to repeat for the third time in her school career, handled the developmental differences between her peers and herself by identifying with one of her teachers, a significant adult in her life:

> "Like, I just sit there and look around the classroom and they're all throwing stuff around and....I'll catch my teacher's eye and we'll just look at each other and shake our heads (in despair)."

All students made attempts to handle their new situation in ways that seemed to reflect their individual unique personality and outlook on life.

Perceived reactions of parents to the retention. Perceived parental reactions seemed balanced in terms of negative and positive, with movement from the former to the latter in a few cases suggesting that "time heals". For example:

> "I got bugged a lot and my dad was very upset for a while. But that's all over now. They understand now."
>
> "My dad was disappointed and thought it was all my fault. He finally accepted that I'm not dumb or stupid."

In terms of negative reactions, most students perceived their parents as becoming stricter; checking on their homework; attempting to enforce and supervise study times; lecturing and, as one student described it, "putting on the pressure". A few parents tended to monitor marks and demonstrated increased sensitivity towards any deterioration in school work, perhaps due to fear of another failure. One student summarised most of the above as follows:

> "My parents were pretty angry. They used to have serious talks with me and things like that. They were very upset. They blamed me. They said

> it was my fault I failed. They make sure I do my homework and stuff like that. Now they treat me the same as last year except they're stricter. I have to do my homework as soon as I get in from school."

"Disappointment" was a descriptor used by several students. In five instances there was evidence of homeostasis - where one parent in the family reacted strongly with disappointment or anger, and the other parent's reaction served to balance or offset the strong one.

> "My dad was very disappointed....it didn't really affect my mom."
>
> "My dad was upset, but my mom was kind of ready for it."
>
> "My dad is short tempered. He would yell and blame me....my mom was understanding about it all and tried to help."

In terms of the positive, 45% of the students believed that despite parental feelings about the retention, there was no significant change in attitude towards and treatment of the student compared with the previous year. Four students perceived their parents as being understanding. Being prepared for the retention seemed to help. If a student showed remorse, a mellowing of parental reactions seemed to occur. Active involvement ensued in one instance, where help with homework and more attention was given. Only one student's parents demonstrated unconditional acceptance of the situation.

> "My parents didn't mind me repeating. They were very open to it. They say I can have as much time as I want to get through school and they don't want to pressure me at all. They treat me just the same as last year. No different at all."

This kind of attitude was the exception rather than the rule.

Perceived reactions of siblings to the retention. As with parental reactions, perceived sibling reactions were equally weighted in terms of the positive

and the negative. On the negative side, taunts (that is, jeering reminders of the retention) were common:

> "My sister....had bugged me a couple of times, like, "Yeah, you failed, you're stupid", but she's joking and doesn't mean it."

Insults, that is, non-joking name calling, seemed to occur when conflicts related to other issues arose. Threats, ("you'd better not fail next year") seemed to indicate caring rather than aggression. On the positive side, it appeared that brothers and sisters who had also repeated a grade, or had come close to it, were the most understanding about it. Some siblings demonstrated acceptance (he treated me just like normal); nonchalance (he didn't care at all); and compassion (they felt sorry for me and have been nicer to me). Sibling reactions probably varied according to the unique interaction of personalities involved and the type of relationships already established.

Repeating in terms of the academic. (also see data in Section 2 and Section 3.) In terms of perceived disadvantages, 85% of the students described repeating as "boring" because of familiarity with course content. Boredom due to lack of novelty effect to capture interest was despairingly described by one student regarding a Science activity:

> "When you do things you do know, you just sit there bored. Like when we were disecting a frog. I was done before the teacher had even finished explaining it and it wasn't fun like it was the year before."

Despite familiarity with course content (perceived in a more positive light by other students as making the work seem "easier"), for four students there was still lack of understanding and low marks. Frustration about this was expressed by one of them:

"I know the stuff! I know it. But the marks aren't showing it."

Investigation by teachers concerning reasons for this did not appear to have occurred. All of the students were recycled through the same programme as the previous year. Special provision in terms of remedial assistance was not available.

Irrelevance of course content was the concern of one student:

> "There isn't much in Grade 7 I'll need to know later on so why repeat it? Why do I need to understand poetry to write computer programmes? (as an adult)."

Other complaints were: not being challenged; not feeling motivated and not being exposed to new material.

In terms of advantages, 40% of the students cited better marks. One student enthusiastically delcared:

> "This year I feel so proud because I got an "A" in Social, my first "A" ever in my whole life!!"

Other students commented on improvement in marks but emphasised that it wasn't enough to warrant having to repeat a whole year. For some students, improved attitude and attention, increased effort, expanded learning and heightened interest were perceived as benefits of repeating. Familiarity with course content resulted in one student feeling less frustrated than in the previous year. Increased confidence for some students resulted in decreased shyness. Thus they were more active participants in classroom discussions, and more actively sought teacher help when needed.

Overall, in terms of academic, there were as may perceived advantages in

repeating the grade as disadvantages.

Attitude towards school. (also see Section 2) Negativism was expressed by one student towards most aspects of the school situation:

> "I've never liked this school. I still don't like it, repeating hasn't changed that. I want to pass with better marks but I just don't like the school, and I don't like the teachers, and I don't like most of the kids."

At the other extreme, one student credited a more positive change in her attitude to improved marks because of repeating. Other students described school as being "okay", "enjoyable", "more fun" and "easier". Acceptance despite misgivings was attributed by one student to the friendship she had made.

Overall, as with nonrepeating students, a variety of feelings were expressed about school; some remained the same as last year and some had altered. But only one student in twenty indicated that his marked deterioration in attitude towards school was directly related to his having to repeat.

Attitude towards teachers. (see also data in Section 2) Many examples were given of some teachers' insensitivity towards the unique situation and feelings of repeating students. For example the following were common: public reminders of retention status; labelling; insulting; use of sarcasm and put-downs. Such insensitivity seemed to arouse anger, embarrassment and resentment in the victimised student and could perhaps ultimately interfere with learning:

> "Some of the teachers really embarrass you eh? Well one of them walks up to you if you're talking or something and she'll go "You already failed a grade. Don't try and fail another!" or something like that in front of everybody else. It's just so embarrassing. I just feel like turning around and giving her a good smack in the face you know. And a lot of people laugh and I think "Oh my God!" because everybody's laughing at me."

Outright hostility towards teachers was expressed by one student:

> "I've got a couple of teachers who hate me and I hate them. Mrs. F. for instance. I can't ask her a question because I'm afraid she'll yell at me. She explains the assignment but sometimes I just don't get it and when I go up for extra help she goes "I just told you!!" She never helps me and I hate her."

Frustration related to possible teacher incompetence regarding meeting student needs was described as follows:

> "They say "If you need help come and see me but I won't do that, especially with teachers I don't like. Like Mr. P. I ask him for extra help and he uses really big words and I still don't understand. And I think to myself "Oh my God what are you talking about?" Like, change to a language I can understand!"

Resentment related to teacher influence on the repetition decision was expressed by one student who could not forgive them for this. Another student commented upon mutual dislike but said "I do their assignments anyways".

On the other hand, valid insights regarding the importance of a good student/teacher relationship was made by a couple of students:

> "I work better with teachers I like and who like me."
>
> "If you don't have a good attitude towards the teachers you don't learn much."

Teachers were also perceived by some students as being more stimulating, more helpful and "nicer" than during the previous year.

Overall, it seemed that, as with non-repeating students, some teachers were perceived in a positive light as being encouraging and as facilitating learning, while others were perceived more negatively as being discouraging and

not meeting student needs. The variable of retention, however, seemed to become additional ammunition for those few teachers who employed verbal abuse in their teaching strategies.

Attitude towards peers in classes this year. (see also Section 2) There were almost as may indications of negative attitudes towards current classmates as positive ones. Ten students (50%) seemed to have established an emotional distance between themselves and their classmates at some time during the year, as revealed in the following comments:

> "I don't mingle much."
>
> "I talk to them sometimes, when I have to, but that's all."
>
> "I kept myself to myself."

Keeping one's distance; not reaching out; not wanting to associate with others were mentioned by several students. For 35% of them, however, their attitude mellowed with constant contact. Over a period of time, "drifting together" in friendship seemed to occur as a result of just being around each other. Nevertheless, although friendships were acknowledged by some, they seemed to be rated second best in comparison with those from last year. Complaints were made about feeling left out and not belonging. One student expressed animosity:

> "They're such a pain; I feel like walking over to them and pounding them, putting them in their place."

A disdain of developmental differences, an impatience with them, an embarrassment about them, was most apparant especially in those who maintained lack of emotional involvement throughout the year:

"They're still in their baby stages making noises."

"They're all stupid. They're all weaklings. They're babies...I don't want little kids coming up to me and talking to me. They embarrass me."

"Some of them are so immature...I thought they'd act better than what they do. They sit in class and giggle....I get sick and tired of them always talking about their boyfriends."

"They do such stupid things like they throw paper airplanes. I think they're such babies."

There were, however, students who could overlook such differences and unconditionally accept their current classmates regardless of age or behaviour, making positive comments acknowledging appreciated characteristics. Caring was perhaps the impetus behind the advice-giving role adopted by one student:

"I advise kids in my class against dope and cigarettes. It has been worthwhile helping them like this."

There was evidence of gestures of friendship being made and reciprocated, and of the development of mutal respect and affection:

"At the beginning of the year I thought, this isn't going to help my social life any, I'm not going to have any friends worth having....but I can't say that now because I have met a lot of new people, and I do like them and they're really nice kids."

For some students, friendships seemed to develop through identification with peers of same age, of similar physical size and/or in the same situation of repeating.

Overall, a few students steadfastly maintained a rigid, negative attitude towards their current classmates. Some found friendships developing despite their initial apprehension and discomfort. Others approached the situation with openess and flexibility and established satisfactory relationships. For many of

these students, however, it was at the expense of the loss of relationships with friends from last year.

Perceived attitude of current classmates. (see also Section 2) Generally, the pattern of perceived reactions was initial avoidance followed by acceptance. One or two students were initially hurt by taunts and insults regarding having to repeat, but this did not seem to last throughout the year. Only one student perceived continuing avoidance which seemed to be his preference anyway:

> "They keep away from me....nobody talks meanly to me. They leave me alone because of my reputation. I like that."

Two other students perceiving themselves as without friends in class focused on lack of common interests and standards.

A healthy 55% perceived their classmates as accepting and open to friendship. Respect and admiration due to physical size, age, experience and knowledge were commented upon and enjoyed by several students:

> "The others in class kind of look up to us older kids because a lot of them are short so they think that we're stronger than them and because we know the questions easier because we've taken it before so they kind of treat us good."

In over half of the cases, variations on the theme "they treated me okay" were common perceptions.

Attitude towards same-age-but-promoted peers. (also see data in Section 2) Most of the students perceived loss of, or less intensity in, friendships with peers who had passed on to higher grades.

Lack of, or reduced opportunities to interact with each other, or even see each other during school hours were blamed:

> "The kids from last year....in the beginning of the year I had their friendship and then it sort of dropped. It just happened! We don't have too much time around each other to continue the friendship."

Other students missed their friends but regarded the friendships as either temporarily suspended or still in existence. Two students pined for days-gone-by.

Retrospective criticism of the friendships was made by a couple of students:

> "I still keep in contact with the kids from last year but not very much. Most of them are just bums. They don't concentrate on anything but partying. They're friendships not worth having. We've grown apart."
>
> "I wasn't very choosey about my friends last year."

On the positive side, 35% perceived friendship bonds as having been maintained through out-of-school contact and/or the minimal amount during school hours. Feelings towards these friends were affectionate and preferential. For those who lost friends to High School came the conviction that the friendship would be re-established the following year.

Overall, the majority of students preferred their friends from last year and simulaneously either maintained the relationship or grieved over the loss.

Perceived attitude of same-age-but-promoted peers. 45% of the students perceived attempts being made to continue the friendships despite reduced amount of contact at school. Although some peers expressed surprise that the student had to repeat, there was evidence of acceptance of the situation and support for the student:

> "The friendships from last year have still lasted....They joked about it

> when they found out I had failed "Oh! too bad for you!" but that wasn't bugging me. None of them have done that."

A cooling down, a growing apart was perceived by a few students:

> "Those from last year still treat me the same, we're still good friends. But not as much. Because we don't have the same classes so we don't see each other much."

Thus despite good intentions, circumstances (lack of contact; lack of common interests) seemed to have a negative impact on the relationships.

At the other extreme, negative reactions such as "ignoring me like I was a nobody" and "they don't associate with me anymore" were commented upon by some students but were perceived by others as serving to separate the sheep from the goats:

> "Well, the friends I thought were friends they sort of bugged me and told me I was dumb. They thought I was loser, I was stupid and all that. They'd say these things to me in front of their friends...."
>
> "Some friends from last year talk to me and some don't. The close ones still do."

The best summary of this situation was made by one insightful, contemplative student as follows:

> "When you have to repeat you find out who your good friends are, who sticks by you, who hangs around when the going gets tough. Not many did. This has been a loss."

Overall, a variety of positive and negative reactions of same-age-but-promoted peers was perceived. They ranged from acceptance of the situation and efforts to maintain the friendship through to deterioration or termination of the relationship due to reduced interaction at school or

unfriendly gestures.

The state of peer relationships and the repeating student could be summarized as follows: 80% of the students in this study, particularly those with few friends or poor relationships last year, regarded the opportunity to make new friends as a distinct advantage of repeating after their initial misgivings about the situation. Increased numbers of friends, old and new, were important to some; improved relationships were seen as an advantage by others. The majority perceived their new classmates as initially cautious but eventually accepting and open to friendship.

The disadvantage of the greatest magnitude, however, was for many the loss of and separation from peers from last year, who were still preferred as friends by most repeating students. This feeling might or might not be reciprocated. Negative reactions from last year's friends became a learning experience for some, whereby they evaluated their own needs in terms of friendships, and proceeded to fulfill them with other relationships.

The relevance of the state of peer relationships to the school situation was commented upon by one student:

> "I've made a lot of friends this year. My marks haven't improved much.....but friendships are more important anyway."

Perhaps adolescent priorities are highlighted here.

Feelings about self. In considering self-esteem after experiencing almost a year of repeating, more students made positive ratings about themselves than negative. For example: "I'm better adjusted"; "I've grown up a lot"; "I have more confidence"; "I'm trying to improve myself"; "I think for myself"; "I've matured". Only one student suggested developmental reasons commenting that

"....it would have happened even if I hadn't repeated". Some students attributed heightened self-esteem to having received better marks during the year, others attributed it to associating with better friends. Left behind, discarded, were "acting stupid", "getting into dumb things", and "belonging to the wrong crowd".

Only two students exhibited signs of low self-esteem and blamed repeating for this:

> "I don't feel good about myself this year, that I failed when I could have passed."
>
> "I'm still disappointed in myself, because it's my own fault I'm here."

Apprehension about having to repeat again was confided by two students; lack of confidence in her own abilities was revealed by another. A student who had emphasised "losing face" as his major concern about repeating, commented that he felt he had lost his dignity. Yet, in addition to this one negative he stated three positives.

Overall, therefore, self ratings at the end of the year of repetition were, for the majority of repeating students, reasonably healthy.

Plans for the future. 85% of the students were determined not to become future drop-out statistics regardless of how long it took to attain a Grade 12 diploma:

> "I don't care if I'm in Grade 12 until I'm 32, I won't drop out!"

Complaints by some students about repeating as a waste of time and money seemed to make no difference to their strong intentions of staying in school and their belief in the value of a good education.

Two students had considered the possibility of dropping out but had rejected the idea because, like the majority, they seemed convinced that decent jobs are not available to those without High School diplomas. For three other students however it seemed that dropping out could become a reality. One expressed discouragement with the increasing difficulty of school work and questioned his ability to handle it at higher grade levels. The other seemed attracted to working on the oil rigs and making good money as soon as possible. For the third, drop-out plans appeared to be contingent on year-end placement decisions:

> "I worry a lot about failing again. If I do, I'll drop out and do correspondence. I can't handle three years in Grade 9."

Only one student lacked long range plans for the future - he hadn't given much thought to it. Others had considered a variety of jobs ranging from blue collar (labouring, carpentry) to professional (architecture, social work). More interest was expressed in computers than in other fields.

Contrary to some research findings (Worth 1959), retention did not appear to be related to drop-out plans. Overall, the majority of students valued a good education and were optimistic about the future with a determination to achieve career goals that might seem incongruous with the label "academic failure". In relation to what might lie ahead, repeating for most of the students in the study was a minor set-back. Hope for, and faith in the future shone bright and clear.

The practice of grade repetition. Opinions seemed to polarise with as many students supporting grade repetition as opposing it. Those who expressed

negative opinions about it reflected either unconditional opposition or conditional opposition. Of the former, reasons expressed were because of:

a)	the time factor:	"Just think, you've got a whole extra year to do before you're out of school."
b)	money factors:	"You lose a whole year's work - about $21,000."
c)	friendship factors:	"You lose all of your friends."
d)	emotional factors:	"You worry the whole year. It's been terrifying for me thinking I might have to repeat again."
e)	academic factors:	"The student doesn't learn anything new. They should have different ways of helping students."

Conditional opposition was suggested by four students. Regardless of failing marks it was suggested that a student not be retained providing he indicated a positive attitude towards improvement and showed willingness to tackle the more advanced work at the next grade level. Effort was emphasised by a student from whom no marks were available last year because of lengthy absences due to medical depression. He believed that effort should count more than amount of work done or marks available. Similarly, other students' opinions also seemed to reflect their own unique situation and experiences.

Eleven students (55%) supported grade retention; 25% unconditionally (so the student doesn't have to struggle in the future; because it helps improve marks; because it increases understanding; because it helps kids work better, etc.) and 30% with certain conditions. For example: only once in a school career; just for failing marks; if the student is lazy; if the student has a poor attitude; providing student and parent opinions are taken into account.

Alternatives to grade repetition. Many suggestions were made. Some could easily be implemented in the school system as it is presently organised. Others were more innovative and would require major adjustments. More teacher assistance was suggested by several students, i.e., group help sessions after school or at recess; private tutoring in problem areas by teachers or peers throughout the year. More teacher guidance and pressure in the form of detentions for incomplete work and extra homework assignments were also suggested, as was counselling to determine learning problems and to receive advice on improving work habits and study skills. Compulsory attendance at summer school was seen as important for those with failing marks, followed by promotion to the next grade to either "sink or swim", that is, to take responsibility for their own "catch-up" and handling of new material.

Innovative alternatives to repeating were as follows: "streaming" in different subject areas at each grade level; repeating individual subjects rather than the grade, that is, being promoted with same-age-peers but joining classes the grade below for subjects failed; attendance at special night school classes throughout the year by those encountering difficulties; the establishment of special classes presenting an easier version of the program in the core subjects for students of the same age; and finally the creation of different types of Grade 12 diplomas reflecting different levels of academic gain, that would ultimately channel students into different types of jobs or future education.

Behind the ability to present an alternative to grade retention might lie the conviction that it is not the only possible remedial action for the low achieving student.

TABLE 3

Student perceptions of changes in academic performance 1983/84 compared with 1982/83.

	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Understanding Language Arts		5%	10%	70%	15%
Marks in Language Arts	5%		20%	45%	30%
Interest in Language Arts		15%	30%	40%	15%
Reading skills		5%	45%	35%	15%
Interest in books	5%	10%	30%	35%	20%
Writing skills			35%	50%	15%
Written reports		10%	30%	45%	15%
Spelling	5%	10%	50%	15%	20%
Grammar		10%	40%	35%	15%
Understanding Math				55%	45%
Marks in Math tests			30%	40%	30%
Interest in Math		10%	20%	30%	40%
Understanding Science		5%	10%	55%	30%
Marks in Science tests		10%	15%	50%	25%
Interest in Science	10%		15%	45%	30%
Understanding Social Studies		15%	35%	40%	10%
Marks in Social tests		15%	20%	35%	30%
Interest in Social		30%	30%	25%	15%
Speaking up in class	5%	5%	25%	45%	20%
Doing homework		5%	20%	65%	10%
Time spent studying		15%	45%	30%	10%
Feelings about tests		5%	75%	15%	5%
Remembering information		5%	30%	50%	15%
Concentrating in class		15%	25%	50%	10%
Paying attention in class		5%	35%	45%	15%
Overall perceptions of school work	1%	8%	29%	42%	20%

2. Findings from the student questionnaire.

Perceptions of changes in academic performance. (see Table 3) "Academic performance" was broken down into 25 items related to the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, and also to work habits, study skills and classroom participation relevant to success in all subject areas. Overall perceptions of changes in these 25 areas were weighted in the direction of improvement - 42% rating them as "a little bit better" than the previous year and 20% rating them "much better". For the majority of students, "speaking up in class", "doing homework", "concentrating in class" and "paying attention" were all slightly improved over last year, perhaps due to the feelings of confidence, the parental supervision and the familiarity with course content mentioned in the student interviews (see Section 1).

In terms of Language Arts, (see Table 3) the majority of the 20 students (58%) perceived overall improvement of differing degrees in the 9 items constituting this subject area. (41% "a little bit better"; 17% "much better".) 32% of the students perceived no change and only 9% perceived deterioration. The most supported rating, however, was "a little bit better". The majority of students (70%) rated their understanding of Language Arts as being "a little bit better" and the majority also perceived improvement in marks. Over half the group perceived improvement in interest. Items related to Language Arts were extracted from Table 3 and considered with regard to the 13 students who failed it last year (see Table 4), and also with regard to the 5 students who passed it last year but were required to take it anyway (see Table 5). There was evidence that half of those who failed it perceived some improvement; 44% rating it "a little bit better" and 6% rating it "much better".

For the other half of the group, no improvement was felt to have occurred. A couple of students even suspected deterioration in achievement. The largest amount of support, however, was for a slight amount of improvement in understanding, followed by similar ratings in "marks in Language Arts", "writing skills" and "written reports". Interest in this subject for the majority of students stayed the same or improved slightly. For the majority of students who did not experience problems with Language Arts last year, improvement was perceived (see Table 5). 36% rated it "a little bit better" and 44% rated it "much better". The 20% who perceived no change in achievement probably questioned the point of having to repeat this subject. The greatest amount of support was for "much better" marks in Language Arts (80%). For this small group, both interest and understanding had improved (60% "a little bit better" and 40% "much better"). Thus repeating Language Arts to these students appeared worthwhile - having already passed this subject could have increased their confidence, their motivation and their positive feelings about the subject.

In summary, the majority of students who failed Language Arts last year perceived improvement (mostly "a little bit better"). The majority of students who passed Language Arts the previous year also perceived improvement, but to a greater degree.

In terms of Math, the majority of students (80%) perceived overall improvement but of differing degrees (42% "a little bit better"; 38% "much better"). 17% of the students perceived no change and 3% perceived deterioration. Improved understanding was experienced by all 20 students. The majority (40%) perceived their interest as being "much better" than last year. Marks were perceived by the majority as being "a little bit better". Items

related to Math were extracted from Table 3 and considered with regard to the 13 students who had failed Math the previous year, and the 5 who had passed it but were required to repeat it anyway (see Table 6). Of the 13 students who failed it in 1983, the majority perceived improvement (46% "a little bit better", and 34% "much better"). The greatest support was for feelings of becoming "a little bit better" in understanding Math. For the majority, marks were perceived to have improved, mainly "a little bit better". Of the 5 students who had passed Math the previous year, understanding it was perceived by the majority to be "much better", possibly related to their feelings of confidence in already having passed this subject the previous year. Marks for the majority of this small group either stayed the same or improved slightly. Interest had increased for most.

In summary, for the 20 students in this study, the majority detected some improvement in Math. For the 13 who failed it last year, this improvement was mostly "a little" and was mainly due to a little bit of improvement in understanding. For those who passed it last year, the improvement tended to be rated "much better than last year", due also to much better improvement in understanding.

In terms of Science, the majority of the 20 students (78%) perceived overall improvement but of differing degrees (50% "a little bit better"; 28% "much better"). 13% perceived no change and 8% perceived deterioration. The most supported rating by these students in this subject area was "a little bit better than last year", for understanding, interest and marks. Items related to Science were extracted from Table 3 and considered with regard to 16 students who failed it last year and 4 who passed it but had to repeat it anyway (see

Table 7). Of the 16 who failed it in 1983, the majority indicated feelings of being "a little bit better" overall, due to similar ratings in terms of interest, understanding and marks obtained. Of the four students who passed Science last year, only one perceived his interest as deteriorating and becoming "much worse than last year", indicating a negative attitude towards it. The other students in this small group indicated overall improvement, mainly as being "a little bit better than last year".

Finally, in Social Studies half of the students in the group of 20 (51%) perceived improvement of differing degrees (33% "a little bit better"; 18% "much better"). 28% of the students perceived no change and 20% perceived deterioration. The majority of students perceived no improvement at all in interest in Social; 30% even perceived deterioration in interest. Perhaps the boredom mentioned by students in their interviews (see Section 1) manifested itself in this subject area more than any other. Items related to Social Studies were extracted from Table 3 and considered with regard to the 14 students who had failed it the previous year and the 4 who had pass it but were required to repeat it anyway (see Table 8). Of those who failed it last year, overall rating were distributed as follows: 45% perceiving improvement (31% "a little bit better"; 14% "much better") and 55% staying the same or deteriorating slightly. There was no overwhelming support for any particular rating. Of those who passed Social in 1983, the majority (75%) perceived improvement. The greatest support was for "a little bit better" understanding of this subject (75%), followed by "much better" marks and "a little bit better" interest.

In summary, marks in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies were rated by the majority of students as seeming to be "a

little bit better than last year". Those who passed Language Arts and Math last year tended to rate their perceptions of marks as "much better" possibly due to the feelings of confidence and success with which they approached the subject.

In terms of understanding in the core subjects, the majority of students rated it as being "a little bit better than last year", except for most of those who failed Social Studies last year and rated their understanding of it as remaining the same.

In terms of interest, the majority of students rated Language Arts and Science as "a little bit better", Math as "much better" and Social Studies as remaining the same or deteriorating slightly. Most of those who failed Social last year felt negatively about it, rating interest in it "a little bit worse". Perhaps this reflected the boredom that was stressed as a disadvantage of repeating in terms of the academic in Section 1.

Thus overall perceptions of changes in academic performance in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies were weighted in the direction of improvement, albeit with a preponderance of "a little bit better" ratings.

The intention of the emphasis in this section on improvement is not to minimise or negate the ratings of those lesser numbers of students who perceived interest, understanding and marks in the core subjects as being worse than last year. Though representing the minority in frequencies, in human terms the feelings of these students count. They are relevant to the total picture of retention. It is possible that these students were experiencing the boredom, the frustration and the discouragement described in Section 1 of this Chapter. For these students, though few in number, repetition of the grade

TABLE 4

Perceptions of changes in Language Arts by the students who failed it.

n = 13	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Reading skills	0%	8%	54%	31%	8%
Interest in books	8%	15%	46%	23%	8%
Writing skills	0%	0%	31%	62%	8%
Written reports	0%	15%	23%	62%	0%
Spelling	8%	15%	54%	23%	0%
Grammar	0%	15%	54%	31%	0%
Understanding Language Arts	0%	8%	15%	69%	8%
Marks in Language Arts	8%	0%	15%	62%	15%
Interest in Language Arts	0%	15%	38%	38%	8%
Overall perceived performance in Language Arts	3%	10%	37%	44%	6%

TABLE 5

Perceptions of Language Arts by those students who did not fail it last year but had to repeat it.

n = 5	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Reading skills	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%
Interest in books	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
Writing skills	0%	0%	60%	0%	40%
Written reports	0%	0%	40%	0%	60%
Spelling	0%	0%	40%	0%	60%
Grammar	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%
Understanding Language Arts	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
Marks in Language Arts	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Interest in Language Arts	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
Overall perceived performance in Language Arts	0%	0%	20%	36%	44%

TABLE 6 a)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Math by the students who failed it.

n = 1	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Understanding Math	0%	0%	0%	61.5%	38.5%
Marks in Math tests	0%	0%	23%	46%	31%
Interest in Math	0%	7.6%	31%	31%	31%
Overall perceived performance in Math	0%	2%	18%	46%	34%

TABLE 6 b)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Math by those who did not fail it but had to repeat it.

n = 5					
Understanding Math	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%
Marks in Math tests	0%	0%	40%	40%	20%
Interest in Math	0%	20%	20%	20%	40%
Overall perceived performance in Math	0%	7%	20%	33%	40%

TABLE 7 a)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Science by the students who failed it.

ń = 16	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Understanding Science	0%	6.25%	12.5%	43.75%	37.5%
Marks in Science tests	0%	12.5%	18.75%	50%	18.75%
Interest in Science	6.5%	0%	18.75%	50%	25%
Overall perceived performance in Science	2%	6%	17%	48%	27%

TABLE 7 b)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Science by those who did not fail it but had to repeat it.

n = 4					
Understanding Science	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Marks in Science tests	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Interest in Science	25%	0%	0%	25%	50%
Overall perceived performance in Science	8.3%	0%	0%	58.3%	33.3%

TABLE 8 a)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Social Studies by the students who failed it.

n = 14	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Understanding Social Studies	0%	21.4%	35.7%	28.5%	14.2%
Marks in Social Studies tests	0%	21.4%	21.4%	42.8%	14.2%
Interest in Social Studies	0%	35.7%	28.5%	21.4%	14.2%
Overall perceived performance in Social Studies	0%	26%	29%	31%	14%

TABLE 8 b)

Perceptions of changes in achievement in Social Studies by those who did not fail it but had to repeat it.

n = 4					
Understanding Social Studies	0%	0%	25%	75%	0%
Marks in Social Studies tests	0%	25%	0%	25%	50%
Interest in Social Studies	0%	25%	0%	50%	25%
Overall perceived performance in Social Studies	0%	17%	8%	50%	25%

TABLE 9

Student perceptions of changes in attitude towards school and teachers.

	n/a	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Coming to school each day		5%	5%	60%	20%	10%
Liking school		5%	20%	35%	30%	10%
Obeying school rules		0%	25%	40%	25%	10%
Behaviour in class		5%	15%	30%	45%	5%
Attending classes		10%	0%	50%	15%	25%
Skipping classes	35%	15%	10%	20%	0%	20%
Participating in extra-curricular activities		5%	30%	25%	15%	25%
Getting along with teachers		5%	10%	20%	55%	10%
Liking teachers		10%	15%	40%	30%	5%
Cooperating with teachers		0%	10%	55%	20%	15%
Teachers liking me		0%	10%	55%	25%	10%
Teachers helping me		0%	20%	30%	40%	10%
Teachers understanding me		0%	20%	40%	35%	5%
Teachers criticising me		5%	10%	65%	10%	10%
Overall attitude towards school	3%	5%	14%	40%	26%	12%

could hardly be perceived as a stimulating, positive experience.

Student perceptions of changes in attitude towards school. Overall, the majority of students seemed to feel that the status quo had been maintained in that most of them (37%) perceived no change in their attitude. Almost the same percentage (36%) perceived some improvement, 21% perceived deterioration. This supports feelings expressed in Section 1 where a similar variety of attitudes was described. In terms of majority ratings, coming to school each day; obeying school rules and attending classes remained unchanged but behaviour in class was perceived to be a little bit better. "Skipping classes" did not apply for the majority. A small percentage of students felt they had problems with coming to school each day, liking school, obeying school rules and behaviour in class (see Table 9).

Student perceptions of changes in attitude towards teachers. Overall, the majority (44%) perceived no change in their attitude this year compared with last year. Almost the same percentage of students (40%) rated an improvement of differing degrees in their attitude. Deterioration was perceived by only 16%. This deterioration in student/teacher relationships might be due to the perceived negative behaviours of teachers described in Section 1. Most students, however, perceived "getting along with teachers" and "teachers helping me" as being a little bit better (see Table 9).

Overall, in attitude towards school and teachers, more students experienced improvement tha.. deterioration, but most perceived it to have remained the same, presumably unaffected by having to repeat.

Perceived relationships with peers. Students were asked to rate their feelings about students in their classes this year compared with feelings about students

in their classes last year. Data were tabulated into categories concerning own treatment of peers (positive and negative) and treatment by peers (positive and negative). The data obtained from these 32 items was not as rich as that generated in the student interviews. In terms of perceived positive treatment of classmates this year compared with last year (see Table 10), some degree of improvement was detected by the majority (38%), but almost the same percentage felt that the situation was the same. Deterioration was sensed by 25%. In terms of gestures of friendship perceived as being made by classmates this year compared with last year, (see Table 11), more than half (51%) felt that they were respected, cared about, understood, liked, included and of interest as a friend to an equivalent degree as with last years peers. 34% of the students experienced more gestures of friendship than last year. Only 15% perceived some degree of deterioration compared with last year, perhaps due to experiencing insults, taunts and ostracism described in Section 1.

In terms of being "mean" to their classmates (see Table 12) the majority of the repeating students perceived the items to be rated as either not applying to them, or as being employed by them to a lesser degree than last year. Only 20% admitted to some degree of increase in their negative treatment of peers in terms of getting into arguments and fights, losing their temper, disliking peers, ignoring them, avoiding them, being jealous of them and hurting their feelings.

In terms of negative treatment by classmates this year compared with last year (see Table 13), 49% of the repeating students had not experienced teasing, being ignored, being talked about, being picked on, being criticised, being embarrassed, being left out or feeling lonely during either year in the

TABLE 10

Perceived positive treatment of peers 1983/84 compared with 1982/83.

n = 20	much less than last year	a little bit less	same as last year	a little bit more	much more than last year
I respect the kids in my class	0%	20%	50%	50%	15%
I care about the kids in my class	0%	35%	40%	5%	20%
I have friends among kids in my class	0%	10%	50%	20%	20%
I like being around kids in my class	5%	20%	35%	15%	25%
I help kids in my class	0%	15%	35%	25%	25%
I trust the kids in my class	10%	25%	35%	20%	10%
I feel happy about the kids in my class	5%	25%	35%	25%	10%
The number of friends I have is	5%	25%	20%	25%	25%
Overall perceived positive treatment of classmates	3%	22%	37%	19%	19%

TABLE 11

Perceived positive treatment by peers 1983/84 compared with 1982/83.

n = 20	much less than last year	a little bit less	same as last year	a little bit more	much more than last year
Kids in my class respect me	0%	10%	40%	35%	15%
Kids in my class care about me	0%	15%	55%	20%	10%
Kids in my class understand me	5%	20%	50%	15%	10%
Kids in my class like me	0%	5%	65%	15%	15%
Kids in my class are friendly to me	0%	25%	40%	20%	15%
Kids in my class include me	0%	15%	55%	20%	10%
Kids in my class like me around	0%	10%	55%	20%	15%
Kids in my class are interested in me	0%	10%	50%	25%	15%
Overall perceived positive treatment by classmates	1%	14%	51%	21%	13%

TABLE 12

Perceived negative treatment of peers 1983/84 compared with 1982/83.

n = 20	n/a	much less than last year	a little bit less	same as last year	a little bit more	much more than last year
I hurt other kids feelings	55%	10%	5%	30%	0%	0%
I get into fights	35%	15%	10%	10%	20%	10%
I get into arguments	10%	15%	10%	25%	35%	5%
I lose my temper	25%	20%	0%	15%	25%	15%
I get jealous of other kids	35%	40%	5%	15%	5%	0%
I avoid other kids	10%	25%	15%	35%	10%	5%
I dislike kids in my class	30%	15%	10%	30%	15%	0%
I ignore kids in my class	50%	20%	5%	10%	15%	0%
Overall perceived negative treatment of classmates by self	31%	20%	8%	21%	16%	4%

TABLE 13

Perceived negative treatment by peers 1983/84 compared with 1982/83.

n = 20	n/a	much less than last year	a little bit less	same as last year	a little bit more	much more than last year
Kids in my class tease me	60%	10%	10%	0%	20%	0%
Kids in my class ignore me	50%	5%	5%	30%	10%	0%
Kids in my class talk about me	35%	10%	15%	10%	25%	5%
Kids in my class pick on me	55%	25%	5%	10%	5%	0%
Kids in my class criticise me	40%	25%	20%	15%	0%	0%
Kids in my class embarrass me	50%	10%	20%	15%	5%	0%
Kids in my class leave me out	55%	0%	25%	15%	5%	0%
I am lonely	45%	25%	5%	10%	10%	5%
Overall perceived negative treatment by classmates	49%	14%	13%	13%	10%	1%

grade. They perceived their classmates as not treating them thus. A minority of 11% however, experienced more of such treatment this year than last to differing degrees.

3. Findings from actual marks obtained in June 1983 and June 1984. (see Table 14)

In St. Albert P.S,S.D. #6 all marks below C-, namely D+, D, D- and F, are categorised as failing marks. For two students in the study a "no marks available" status was given in 1983 because of chronic absenteeism due to illness preventing required work from being completed and exams from being taken. Of the other 18 students in this study, the following percentages had failing marks in June 1983:

72% in Language Arts
72% in Math
89% in Science
78% in Social Studies

After repeating the same course content for a whole year, the following percentages still had failing marks in June 1984:

33% in Language Arts
33% in Math
28% in Science
44% in Social Studies

Thus, in terms of helping students achieve passing marks, repeating the grade was not an overwhelming success. The majority (70%) obtained an average in the C's, i.e., a minimum passing grade. In some instances, deterioration of marks occurred. Three students failed in subject areas in which they had received passing marks in the previous year:

1 student in Language Arts	(from a C- to a D)
1 student in Math	(from a C to a D)
1 student in Social Studies	(from a C- to a D)

Failing marks in a minimum of two subject areas seemed to be one of the criteria of retention for these students in 1983, yet seven students (35%) still received failing marks in two or more subjects after repeating the year. Regardless, in September 1984, all but one of the students in this study were promoted to the next higher grade despite apparant lack of prerequisite skills to handle the more advanced work. This action either represented inconsistencies in promotion/retention criteria, or changes in them. In the case of the one student who was not promoted this year, a committee of school personel met to discuss her chronic absenteeism during the year of repetition (due not to illness but to concern over family problems and discouragement at being 16 years old and still in Grade 8). It was recommended that this student repeat Grade 8 for a second time because of poor attitude and amount of class time missed (interpreted by some teachers as defiance). The student subsequently dropped out of school being of legal age to do so.

Improvement of marks in the core subjects occurred for the majority of the 20 students in the study (85%). The average point increase over all subject areas was calculated to be 2.5 points, that is for example from a D+ to a C or C+ (see Table 16 based on Table 15). Overall, Language Arts was the subject with the least average point increase, Science was the highest.

Percentages of students and the degree of change in their marks as a result of repeating can be seen in Table 17. Overall, the greatest amount of increase was 2.5 grades that is 7 points attained by one student in Language Arts. The majority of students increased by up to 1 grade (3 points). The 15%

TABLE 14

Actual marks obtained in June 1983 and June 1984.

A = 80 to 100%
B = 65 to 79%
C = 50 to 64%
D = 40 to 49%
F = below 40%

	1983					1984				
Student	L.A.	Math	Sc.	Soc.	Av.	L.A.	Math	Sc.	Soc.	Av.
1	F	C	C-	F	D	C+	C+	C	D+	C
2	C-	C+	F	D	D+	C+	B+	C	C	C+
3	D	D	D	F	D-	C-	C	C-	D+	C-
4	D	F	F	F	F	C-	D	D	C+	C-
5	D+	D+	C-	D+	D+	C+	B-	B	C	B-
6	D	F	D	F	D-	D+	F	C	D	D+
7	C-	F	D	D+	D+	C+	D	C	C-	C-
8	D+	F	F	F	D-	F	C	F	D+	D
9		N.M.A.			F	C+	C+	B-	C	C+
10	F	C	F	F	D-	B-	D	C+	D+	C
11	D+	C-	D+	D-	D+	C	B-	C+	C+	C+
12	F	F	D	F	D-	D	C-	C+	D	C-
13	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
14	C	F	F	C	D+	C	C+	C+	C-	C
15		N.M.A.			F	B	A-	B+	B-	B+
16	D	D	F	C-	D	C-	B-	C+	D	C
17	D-	D+	F	B+	D+	C	C+	C+	C	C+
18	C-	C-	D+	D+	C-	D	C	C+	C-	C-
19	C-	F	D-	D	D	C	C	D+	B-	C
20	D+	F	F	C-	D	D	D-	D+	C+	D+

TABLE 15

Points difference between marks.

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
A-	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
B+	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
B	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
B-	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C+	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
C	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5
C-	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4
D+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3
D	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2
D-	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	1
F	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

TABLE 16

Points difference between marks allocated in June 1983 and June 1984.

Student	Language Arts	Math	Science	Social	Average
1	+6	+1	+1	+3	2.75
2	+2	+3	+5	+3	3.25
3	+2	+3	+2	+3	2.5
4	+3	+2	+2	+6	3.25
5	+3	+4	+4	+2	3.25
6	+1	0	+3	+2	1.5
7	+2	+2	+3	+1	2.0
8	-3	+5	0	+3	1.25
9	no marks allocated in June 1983				
10	+7	+3	+6	+3	4.75
11	+2	+3	+3	+5	3.25
12	+2	+4	+4	+2	3.0
13	0	0	0	0	0
14	0	+6	+6	-1	2.75
15	no marks allocated in June 1983				
16	+2	+5	+6	+2	3.75
17	+4	+3	+6	-4	2.25
18	+2	+1	+3	+1	1.75
19	+1	+5	+2	+5	3.25
20	-1	+1	+3	+2	1.25
TOTALS	35	51	59	38	45.75
Average Point Differences	+1.9	+2.8	+3.2	+2.1	+2.5

TABLE 17

Percentages of students achieving differing degrees of change in marks.

	decrease			no change	increase				
n = 18	1.5 grades	1 grade	.5 grade	0	.5 grade	1 grade	1.5 grades	2 grades	2.5 grades
Language Arts	-	5.5%	5.5%	11%	50%	11%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
Math	-	-	-	11%	28%	28%	28%	5.5%	-
Science	-	-	-	11%	22%	28%	17%	22%	-
Social Studies	5.5%	-	5.5%	5.5%	39%	28%	11%	5.5%	-
Overall	1%	1%	3%	10%	35%	24%	15%	10%	1%

.5 grade = 1, 2 points difference in marks between 1983 and 1984
1 grade = 3 points difference in marks between 1983 and 1984
1.5 grades = 4, 5 points difference in marks between 1983 and 1984
2 grades = 6 points difference in marks between 1983 and 1984
2.5 grades = 7, 8 points difference in marks between 1983 and 1984

of students who experienced no improvement (that is, no change or deterioration) probably questioned the point of having to repeat. For these students repeating was not a success in terms of improving academic achievement as determined by increased marks. 85% of the repeating students achieved improvement in marks, but mostly with an increase of only .5 to 1 grade (1, 2 or 3 points). This is not an overwhelming improvement - it is probably equivalent to the "little bit better" rating perceived by the students in Section 2.

It was not intended that this be a correlational study between the two variables subjective reality and objective reality, that is, student perceptions of marks and actual marks. Nor were student perceptions intended to be predictions. Nevertheless it might be observed that for some students their feelings about their marks corresponded with the actual marks, but for others discrepancies were apparent (see Table 18). Thus it appears that some students were more optimistic than others, and some more cautious. The discrepancies do not however invalidate the perceptions. Variables such as exam anxiety or teacher biase in allocating marks could have affected the final results.

4. Findings from the teacher questionnaire.

Data in Table 19 indicates that overall, of the 13 teachers who participated in the study, the majority (46%) rated student changes in the combination of achievement, attitude, and peer relationships as being "a little bit better than last year". 40% of the teachers rated changes as being the "same as last year". Thus, no dramatic improvement or drastic deterioration has been observed.

Teacher perceptions of changes in academic achievement of retained students.

Data in Table 19 indicates that no teacher perceived deterioration. The

TABLE 18

A comparison of changes in year-end marks in Language Arts and prior perceptions of them.

Student	Objective reality	Subjective reality
1	increase of 8 points	"same as last year"
2	increase of 7 points	"same as last year"
3	increase of 6 points	"much better than last year"
4	increase of 6 points	"a little bit better"
5	increase of 4 points	"a little bit better"
6	increase of 3 points	"a little bit better"
7	increase of 3 points	"a little bit better"
8	increase of 2 points	"much better than last year"
9	increase of 2 points	"much better than last year"
10	increase of 2 points	"much better than last year"
11	increase of 2 points	"a little bit better"
12	increase of 2 points	"a little bit better"
13	increase of 2 points	"same as last year"
14	increase of 2 points	"same as last year"
15	increase of 1 point	"much better than last year"
16	increase of 1 point	"a little bit better"
17	no increase	"much better than last year"
18	no increase	"a little bit better"
19	decrease of 1 point	"a little bit better"
20	decrease of 3 points	"much worse than last year"

majority (69%) rated achievement as being "a little bit better than last year". Observations indicated an awareness of many more advantages of repeating in terms of the academic than disadvantages. Improvement, both slight and considerable, in basic skills, work habits and efforts was mentioned by some. Qualities and attitudes that affect academic performance such as being better organised, more consistent, more responsible, more cooperative, more self-confident, and responding better to suggestions were described by others. Only two teachers (15%) made negative comments about the students who selected them:

> "He appears unmotivated. He is not a bad boy but comes to class unprepared and makes little effort to complete his work."
>
> "He had not shown much improvement at all. He has not tried to improve."

In summary, teacher perceptions in this area tended to be weighted heavily towards the positive, and there was evidence that they were more aware of the advantages than the disadvantages.

Teacher perceptions of retained students attitude towards school. Data from Table 19 suggests that none of the 13 teachers perceived any deterioration in attitude towards school in the repeating students. The majority of teachers (54%) rated improvement in this area, perceiving attitudes as being "a little bit better than last year". No negative comments were made about any student's attitude towards school. Responses to open ended questions were all positive suggesting repeating generates only advantages. The following student characteristics were described: more cheerful; more confident; more punctual; more mature attitude; more open and relaxed; more responsible; more actively

participating in school activities. One teacher summed up the situation succinctly as follows:

> "Her attitude is much better. Generally she seems much happier than last year."

Overall, the teachers painted a much brighter picture of attitude towards school than the students did.

Teacher perceptions of student attitude towards teachers. Data from Table 19 indicates that none of the teachers perceived any deterioration. The majority (46%) sensed attitude towards themselves as being "a little bit better than last year". 38% experienced it as being the same as last year. Observations were all positive. Students were described as being: more cooperative in completing tasks; more pleasant to work with; more cheerful; more mature; more responsive and friendlier. No teacher indicated he/she had detected any of the resentment, anger embarrassment and frustration mentioned by some of the repeating students in Section 1.

Teacher perceptions of student relationships with classmates. Data from Table 19 suggests that the majority of teachers (60%) observed relationships of students with peers in classes this year as being the same as or equivalent to those with students in classes last year. In terms of relationships with current classmates, there were more positive perceptions than negative ones. "Fitting in well", "getting along well", "relating well", "being accepted", and "interacting well" with current classmates were all mentioned. The development of an extended circle of friends, and improved relationships were seen as advantages of repeating by a couple of teachers. One teacher commented on lack of patience displayed by one student despite having established friendships. Only

one negative observation was made by one teacher:

> "She coexists with the students in her classes this year. She works with them when she has to. She has made few overtures of friendship to the students in here classes because she is still very close to her friends from last year."

In terms of relationships with same-age-but-promoted peers only two students were perceived as preferring the company of friends from last year despite being accepted by current classmates. For other students however, it was noted that lack of opportunity for interaction has weakened or destroyed the friendship bonds.

Teacher perceptions of friendships generally supported those of the student themselves, but did not indicate sensitivity to the pain of the loss of old friendships, the initial feelings of loneliness and the embarrassment related to verbal harrassment experienced by some.

Teacher feelings regarding the practice of grade repetition. Most teachers support it (77%). 23% were undecided and nobody opposed it. Of the proponants, support for it by some was unconditional because of a belief in academic advantages, the opportunity to experience success and fulfillment and the maintenance of standards. Those who supported it conditionally stated that marks should not be the only deciding factor in the retention decision - a student's age, maturity level and home situation should also be taken into account. Immaturity, absenteeism and incompleted assignments were quoted by one teacher as criteria of retention.

The "undecided" teachers were aware of pros and cons:

> "Retention can be both beneficial and harmful depending on how parents, students and teachers react to it."

In summary, two teachers did not see repeating as a cut and dried situation. One of them stated:

> "There is no general solution to this problem because every student's situation is very specific and very unique. I have seen students benefit from an extra year in a grade but I have also seen them deteriorate."

This perhaps pinpoints the crux of the matter.

Out of the 13 teachers, only 2 indicated awareness of any special provision being made for the repeating student in various subject areas. One teacher referred to the Junior High Pre-Vocational program in the district as being suggested but subsequently refused, as an alternative to the regular program. One student had received assistance in the areas of time management, organisational skills, etc. All other students, as far as the teachers were aware, repeated everything from the beginning of the program for that grade level, with no special provision being made except for choice of options.

Only 7 teachers suggested alternatives to repetition for students with failing marks. These were:

- compulsory attendance at summer school,
- tutorials throughout the year,
- less academic programs,
- alternative programs (such as Pre-vocational),
- more time spent on the core subjects and less on options,

It seemed as though teachers had not given much thought to the possibility of alternatives, perhaps indicating satisfaction with the status quo.

TABLE 19

Teacher perceptions of repetition.

	much worse than last year	a little bit worse	same as last year	a little bit better	much better than last year
Student academic achievement	0%	0%	23%	69%	8%
Student attitude towards school	0%	0%	38%	54%	8%
Student attitude towards teachers	0%	0%	38%	46%	16%
Student relationship with classmates	8%	8%	60%	16%	8%
Overall perceptions of repeating along the above dimensions	2%	2%	40%	46%	10%

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Overview of the study.

The major purpose of this study was to paint a picture of grade retention at the Junior High School level in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 during the 1983/84 school year. This was done by collecting information from students presently repeating Grades 7, 8 or 9 regarding their perceptions, current and retrospective of the following:

- the reason(s) for having to repeat the grade,
- the initial impact of the retention decree,
- their present attitude towards the retention decision,
- emotional reactions at the beginning of the year of repetition,
- coping behaviours utilized at this time,
- parental reactions to the retention,
- sibling reactions to the retention,
- repeating in terms of academic achievement,
- repeating in terms of attitude towards school and teachers,
- repeating in terms of relationships with promoted peers,
- changes in feelings about self,
- plans for the future in terms of schooling and employment,
- grade retention as a practice at the Junior High School level,
- possible alternatives to grade retention to remedy low achievement,

To supplement student perceptions of the retention experience, year end marks were obtained from student records for 1983 and 1984. Furthermore, teacher perceptions of changes in the following during the two years in the grade were obtained; students' academic achievement, students' attitude towards school and teachers, and students' peer relationships. In addition, teachers' opinions regarding the practice of grade repetition and their suggestions regarding alternatives to it were sought.

Information concerning the above was collected by use of audiotapes of individual students, questionnaires completed by students, marks recorded in student files and questionnaires completed by teachers (see Chapter III).

Summary of the findings.

Only a small percentage (1.5%) of the total number of Junior High School students in St. Albert P.S.S.D. #6 were required to repeat the 1983/84 school year. Thus in terms of percentages, repeating did not appear to pose a major problem for the District. In human terms, however, 1.5% represents 20 thinking, feeling, unique individuals for whom the "cure" for low achievement, and its side effects, for some, at differing times, became more of a problem than a remedy.

Data from the student audiotapes indicated the following:

Reasons for having to repeat were mainly negative. 90% of the students quoted failing marks in two or more subjects plus a combination of other reasons such as not trying hard enough, having a poor attitude, not completing the required work. Lesser quoted reasons were; concern about problems at home, inappropriate behaviour at school and lengthy absences. Blaming of others did not occur. Perceiving retention in a positive light, as an opportunity

for growth and improvement was rare. Retention was viewed by most as a symbol of failure.

The initial impact of the retention decree produced negative reactions in most students, primarily anger and/or depression. Students who had not entertained the possibility of retention reacted more intensely than those who said they expected it. Anticipation did not, however, guarantee acceptance, but it softened the blow somewhat.

After almost a year of repeating, most students were able to view the retention decision objectively. In terms of their current attitude towards it, the majority perceived it as "fair" and "deserved" in relation to school criteria for it, despite their feelings about it.

Painful memories of their first days as a repeater were recalled by most of the students. Negative emotional reactions at the beginning of the year of repetition included embarrassment, fear, shame, animosity, boredom, feeling different and not belonging. Very few students felt comfortable with the situation.

All students devised strategies to help them handle the situation. Some were positive such as; ignoring negative behaviours of peers, making gestures of friendship, reframing, voluntarily improving their own behaviour and identifying with certain classmates. Some were negative such as; withdrawal, avoidance, procrastinating, denial and hostility. Coping behaviours utilized seemed to reflect each students' personality and outlook on life.

Perceived parental reactions seemed equally balanced in terms of negative and positive with movement from the former to the latter in a few cases suggesting "time heals". 45% of the students believed that despite

parental feelings about the retention, there was no signficantly lasting change in attitude towards, and treatment of, the student compared with the previous year.

Overall, the majority of students preferred the company of promoted friends and either attempted to maintain the relationship, despite reduced amount of time at school to nourish it, or regretted the loss. A variety of positive and negative reactions of same-age-but-promoted peers was perceived, ranging from support and acceptance through to lack of effort to maintain the relationship.

Overall, for the majority of the students at the end of the year of repetition, self-ratings were reasonably healthy.

Most students were averse to the idea of dropping out of school before Grade 12. Overall, the majority seemed to appreciate the value of a good education and were optimistic about the future.

Despite the predominance of negative feelings about having to repeat, as many students favoured grade retention as a practice as opposed it (for students other than self). Unconditional and conditional support were expressed as were unconditional opposition and conditional opposition. Personal experiences seemed to influence opinions.

Many suggestions were made regarding possible alternatives to grade repetition. Some appeared practical, others did not. The ability to suggest an alternative could indicate notions in students that retention is not the only appropriate remedial action for the low achieving student.

Data from the student questionnaire indicated that perceptions of changes in the core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies were

weighted in the direction of improvement with a preponderance of "a little bit better" ratings. Higher degrees of improvement were perceived by those who had passed Language Arts and Math last year. At the other extreme, a few students perceived deterioration in some subjects, possibly due to boredom and/or frustration. For the majority, "understanding" did not appear to deteriorate in these subject areas. "Interest", however, varied with no particular pattern.

Ratings of perceived changes in attitude towards school and teachers indicated that more students experienced some improvement than deterioration, but most perceived their attitude to have remained the same, presumably unaffected by having to repeat.

In terms of relationships with peers this year compared with last year, most students in the study felt they treated current classmates as well as, or better than, those in their classes last year. Only 20% admitted to some degree of increase in their negative treatment of peers. In return, most students perceived themselves as being treated as well as or better than they were last year. A minority of 11% indicated that they were suffering more.

Findings from a comparison of actual marks obtained in June 1983 and June 1984 indicated that overall improvement of marks in the core subjects occurred for the majority of students. The average point increase was, however, only 2.5 points, that is for example, from a D+ to less than a C+. 35% of the students still received failing marks in two or more subjects after a year of repetition. In some instances, deterioration of marks occurred. Three students failed in subject areas they had passed the previous year.

Findings from the teacher questionnaire were as follows:

- No teacher perceived deterioration in the academic achievement of repeating students. Many more advantages were perceived along this dimension than disadvantages.
- No teacher perceived deterioration in attitude towards school and teachers. The majority saw improvement as being "a little bit better" than last year. Observations along these dimensions were positive.
- All teachers perceived more positive aspects to relationships with current classmates than negative. Lack of opportunity for interaction with friends from last year was noted to have weakened or destroyed friendship bonds. No teacher gave any indication of having been aware of adjustment problems during the early stages of being a "repeater".
- No teacher opposed the practice of grade repetition, the majority supported it either unconditionally or conditionally. Those who were undecided were aware of pros and cons and emphasized the importance of careful consideration of each individual case.
- No teacher had made any special provision for repeating students in his or her class, neither was any awareness indicated of other teachers in the school doing so.
- Few alternatives to retention were suggested, perhaps indicating satisfaction with the status quo.

Discussion.

The achievement of the twenty students who participated in this study during the first year in their respective grades was either insufficient or

inadequate to warrant promotion to the next higher grade. Thus, repeating the grade was prescribed by administrators to fulfill academic gaps and needs. For most of the students in this study, the retention was not an overwhelming success in accomplishing such goals. It could hardly be described as a stimulating, motivating, positive experience in terms of the academic. Results of this study support those of Allison (1959) and Gaite (1969), both of whom researched retention at Junior High Schools. Findings indicate that although most of the students did better work during the second year in the grade, generally most received only minimum passing grades and an average increase of only 2.5 points, that is, for example, from an F to less than a D. Such a small amount of academic growth the second time around does not seem to warrant the investment of a whole school year. Neither does it seem to be good value for money. The annual cost of educating an individual student in St. Albert P.S.S.D. #6 is approximately $3,000. The cost to the District, and ultimately to the taxpayer, of requiring that the twenty students in the study repeat a grade, seems an exorbitant price to pay for the "little bit better" increase in marks attained by most, the deterioration in marks occurring for some, and the failing marks assigned to a few. Most students were not much better prepared to handle work at the next grade than they had been the year before. Perhaps the educational dollar would be better spent investigating and diagnosing causes of individual student's low achievement and developing more economical and efficacious ways and means of improving it.

In terms of attitude towards school and teachers, noticable deterioration did not occur despite complaints from some students regarding derogatory remarks being made by some teachers concerning retention status. For the

majority, their attitudes either remained the same or improved slightly, challenging the findings in the literature suggesting a relationship between repeating students and negative attitudes. Had a different research design been employed in this study whereby attitudes of a group of repeaters was compared with a control group of matched regularly promoted peers, the findings might have appeared in a different light.

The results of this study in terms of the social relationships of the majority of the students, challenge warnings from the literature about the possible harm of enforced separation, the possibility of a decline in social adjustment, the possibility of discrimination and reduced chance of social acceptance. (Goodlad, 1954; Morrison and Perry 1956; Bocks 1977; Whelan 1979; Seldon 1982). Retention was not perceived by the majority of students as having a lasting adverse effect on social-personal development. The findings of this study tended to support those of Sandin (1944) however, in that most of the retained students on average preferred the companionship of students in the next higher grade and would like to join them there.

Socially and emotionally, the worst period of time for most students was when they received the news about having to repeat and also during the initial adjustment period at the beginning of the year of repetition. Painful memories were recalled by most. Yet no teacher gave any indication of having observed either negative emotional reactions or negative coping behaviours at these times. Perhaps this suggests a lack of awareness of students' affective states, or an inability to recognize social/emotional difficulities, perhaps due to an orientation towards subject matter rather than people. Generally, teacher perceptions tended to be rosier than students', especially in terms of

achievement and attitude towards school and teachers. Teacher influence and ultimate accountability in these areas could have biased their viewpoint. Negative perceptions might reflect detrimentally on themselves.

No student mentioned counsellor involvement during the early stages of repeating in terms of offering emotional support, providing an opportunity for the expression of negative feelings, teaching positive coping skills and/or discussing interpersonal relationships. Robertson West and Herman (1983) collected data from questionnaires concerning the adequacy and quality of guidance in Alberta schools. Secondary school counsellors were asked to assign ranks to guidance functions. Results indicated that helping secondary school students adjust to new school situations placed quite highly at third. Helping secondary school students deal with their negative feelings towards school and to develop positive attitudes towards their school work placed seventh. Whether or not the counsellors surveyed related these two aspects of their work specifically to repeating students is not known, but there seems to be a need to do so. There was no mention by students in this study of counsellors fulfilling such needs.

Overall, at the end of the year of repetition, however, socially, emotionally and personally, the majority of students had coped reasonably well with a situation commonly perceived as unpleasant and undesirable. Thus there was no significant support for the possible "lasting damage" in these areas that was hypothesized after a review of the literature concerning characteristics of adolescents. Whether or not such damage might emerge later in the student's school career is open to speculation. Although retention was viewed by most students as a symbol of failure, there was no evidence of the majority adopting

the "failure identity" described by Glasser (1969).

Perceptions of students regarding parental reactions suggested that parental response was determined by their own idiosyncratic interpretation of "retention", and upon their expectations of and aspirations for their child. It is possible that emotional support of the student by his family might facilitiate his adjustment to the retention situation. Their encouragement, that is, their focusing on his strengths and assets rather than berating his weaknesses, might also enhance his self-esteem, thus enabling him to approach his school work positively.

In terms of plans for the future, most students envisioned themselves as completing Grade 12 and seemed to place high value on the importance of a good education. These perceptions challenged those of researchers who have discovered a relationship between retention and "school holding power". (Worth 1959; Miller, Frazier and Richie 1980; Seldon 1982). Had the subjects in this study been retained students from a lower socio-economic area than St. Albert, predictions of the future in terms of schooling and employment might have been vastly different.

All of the students in the study suggested alternatives to repeating to remedy low achievement. Similarly, several researchers have proposed different solutions to the promotion/retention dilemma such as; non-graded programs (Haddad 1979), individualized instruction (Reiter 1983), partial promotion with repetition of one or two courses (Jackson 1975), transition classes (Lieberman 1980), alternative programs (Bossing 1980), remedial programs within grade levels (Baenen 1980), and changing the present grading system to A, B, C and "Incomplete" (Powell 1981). An in depth discussion of the

possible merits of such alternatives, however is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Reiter (1973) believes that the key question is actually not whether academically deficient students should be retained, but how the most favourable learning situation can be provided for each. This writer agrees.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

If required standards of achievement are to be maintained at each grade level, as the main "reason for retention" implies, there will always be a certain percentage of low achievers if the concept of the normal curve is to have any validity. Though few in number, the low achievers in this study represent 20 individual students who deserve the best the educational dollar can buy in terms of facilitating optimum development along all dimensions. Retention, according to the findings of this study, does not do this to any significant degree. Also, its outcome in terms of academic achievement seem to be poor return for the amount of time and money invested in it. It should, therefore, be discontinued as a practice. Common sense, however, indicates that a student who is having serious academic difficulties in one grade is likely to continue having difficulties if merely promoted to the next grade. Thus, more efficacious methods of catering to the special needs of low achieving students, without aggravating their weaknesses, need to be sought. Discovering innovative methods for reaching problem students must be considered a top priority by school administrators and teachers. Basically the school organization should be sufficiently flexible to promote individual progress to provide special resources and alternative programs for students who are not achieving, rather than recycling them through the same grade. For example, modification of the grade system by implementing individualized

instruction from Grade 7 to 9 would allow students to progress at their own rate without engendering a sense of failure. Mature and capable students could complete the three grades in two years. Slower learners and less motivated students might take four years. There would not have to be any repetition; minimum competancy standards should be achieved without resorting to this.

Alternatively, the money currently spent on enabling the 20 students to repeat a grade would be better spent by employing four half time teachers, preferably with a special education background, to be located at each Junior High School in St. Albert. Low achievers, considered by teachers as eligible for retention, would be promoted with same age peers and would join them for classes in subject areas passed. For half a day, however, under the direction of one of the above teachers, in a small group setting of other low achievers of different ages, the student would follow an individualized program. This would have been designed after intensive investigation as to the reasons for the low achievement by the counsellor in consultation with appropriate teachers from previous year. Complete re-entry into the age-appropriate grade would depend on incomplete work from last year being done satisfactorily, exams from last year being passed satisfactorily, and problem areas such as, for example, poor short term memory, inadequate note taking, lack of motivation, etc., being remediated.

Within the framework of the school system as it currently exists, prevention of failure in the core subjects might be the most effective method of meeting the needs of low achieving students, and might be the best alternative to repetition. In the early months of the first year at all grade levels, teachers should be alert to individual students experiencing problems

hindering their progress. Suggestions for remediation should be made to students and assistance sought from parents, counsellors, special education personnel, private tutors and so on. Progress should continue to be monitored throughout the school year and special provision over and above the regular program provided to ensure that all students achieve the required standards in all subject areas for promotion to the next grade. Should minimum standards still not be met, and should retention as a practice continue in St. Albert Junior High Schools, the following recommendations should be implemented.

Definitive policies regarding retention should be established by administrators and teachers throughout the District to ensure consistency, and thus fairness, from school to school. Criteria for retention/promotion should be communicated to all students, not as a threat or motivator, but as a clarification of a school practice. Criteria for promotion after two years in a grade should likewise be established.

In view of the initial reactions of the students in this study, it is important that an impending repetition be approached by all parties involved in a positive manner. The possibility of retention, and the reasons for it, should be discussed between teachers, parents and child, at least half way through the school year. Reasons for retention should always be couched in positive terms, for example, as an opportunity for improvement, as a second chance. Support from parents, teachers, specialists and child for the retention must be sought. Pros and cons according to the literature should be presented honestly, and consensus must eventually be reached that retention is the most appropriate way of dealing with the student's particular problems. Consideration should be given to the possibility of problem areas being reviewed, and "incomplete work"

being done at summer school. Promotion could be contingent on successful attendance at summer school.

In view of teacher perceptions of retention compared with those of students as revealed by this study, it seems that in-services to sensitize teachers to the special social, emotional and personal needs of repeating students are necessary. Teachers should become acquainted with the current research on this topic. Also they should be made aware of the futility of threatening retention, and maligning repeaters in the hopes of increasing effort and motivation. If possible, the retained student should be exposed to different teachers during his second year in the grade. Individual attention should be given to him, plus special provisions over and above the regular program, to ensure his second year is not simply a repetition of the first. His progress should be monitored closely to allow for quick discovery and correction of any problems.

Counsellor involvement with low achieving students is important in terms of psychological assessment to determine if achievement is commensurate with intellectual ability, and if not, to discover why not. The counsellor should be alert for learning disabilities and/or motivation problems. He should make appropriate recommendations to parents, teachers and student regarding his findings. Frequent communication with the home is essential in enlisting parental support for remedial action.

In view of the retained students' emotional reactions at the beginning of the second year in the grade, counsellor support and intervention should be oriented towards promoting self-enhancement groups enabling repeaters to share common feelings about repeating to come to terms with it.

Such group sessions could serve to improve socialization skills, to increase self-confidence and so on. Although the initial negative reactions of the students in this study only lasted from 2 weeks to 2 months, this emotional stress should not be discounted or belittled. Teachers and counsellors should be sensitive to these students' emotional states and needs at this time.

In conclusion, the following might be considered. S. Walton (1984) reviewed the book "Young adolescents and their parents" which is based on the response of more than 8,000 fifth through ninth graders. Among the findings was that the chief worry of these students was how they were doing in school. This concern out-rated those about nuclear war, being mugged, acid rain and so on. Most of the students cared about their progress. As Maslow says, human beings are growth oriented. Thus, all students have a right to the very best our school system can offer in terms of encouraging growth through the basic educational objectives of imparting knowledge, promoting literacy, teaching basic skills and facilitiating optimum social, emotional and personal development.

The results of this descriptive study of the perceived effects of grade retention upon 20 students in four Junior High Schools in St. Albert P.S.S.D. #6 suggest that the practice of retaining students in the same grade for an extra year, though not greatly harmful to intellectual social, emotional and personal development, seems to be a second-rate, uneconomical, inefficient means of accomplishing basic educational objectives. Our young people deserve better than this.

Further research.

For further research into the issue of retention at the Junior High School

level, the following are recommended:

a) A longitudinal study of this group of students as they progress from their current grade through to Grade 12, and even beyond, if possible.

b) A study similar to this one comparing a group of repeating students with a control group of matched, low achieving, promoted students in terms of achievement, attitude towards school and peer relationships.

c) The development and implementation of an alternative program designed to meet the needs of low achieving students at this level. Potential repeaters would be assigned at random to either completion of a second year in the grade, or participation in the program. A comparison of the effectiveness of the different approaches in improving academic performance would be made.

d) A study of the causes of low achievement at the Junior High School level.

e) Further investigation of parental attitudes towards the retention of their child.

f) Investigation of the impact of retention of school aged siblings in terms of perceived stress and pressure to succeed, progress in school and attitude towards school work.

g) A study of the emotional states of repeating students throughout the year, compared with a control group of matched, promoted peers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A - 1 LETTER TO PARENTS

APPENDIX A - 2 LETTER TO TEACHERS

APPENDIX A - 1

LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent:

I am interested in conducting a study of changes in academic achievement, attitude towards school, and peer relationships of students who are currently repeating Grades 7, 8 and 9 in St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6.

I have developed a simple questionnaire related to these issues that I would like your child to complete. I would also like to interview him/her to record his/her feelings and opinions about the year of repetition. All this data will be incorporated into my Master of Education thesis about the effects of grade repetition as perceived by Junior High School students currently experiencing it.

I would appreciate your permission for your child to participate in this study (which will involve about half an hour of his time), and request that you complete the form overleaf and return it to school on Monday.

Further information about this study can be obtained from me, either at my home number (459-5094) or place of employment (459-3114).

Yours sincerely,

Ann Foster

I am willing for my son/daughter to participate in a study conducted by Ann Foster on the effects of grade repetition as perceived by Junior High School students currently experiencing it.

In exchange, if requested, I may receive feedback about the results after completion of the study.

I understand that my son/daughter will be required to complete a simple questionnaire and will participate in a short interview recorded on audiotape. The tape will be erased after the study is completed.

I understand that only information pertinent to the student's perception of retention will be used in the study.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name of student _____ Grade _____

APPENDIX A - 2

LETTER TO TEACHERS

SAMPLE LETTER TO STAFF

To: Teaching Staff: _____ Junior High School

From: Ann Foster (Counsellor) Keenooshayo Elementary School, St. Albert

For my M.Ed. thesis I am conducting a descriptive study of changes (if any) in academic achievement, attitude towards school and peer relationships of students who are currently repeating Grades 7, 8 and 9 in St. Albert P.S.S.D. #6. Basically I am investigating what the student perceives to have been gained and/or lost during the year of retention as compared with the previous year in that grade.

The following students have agreed to participate in this study:

I would like to spend about half an hour with each student on an individual basis, to interview him/her and then to have him/her complete a simple questionnaire. I would very much appreciate your co-operation in releasing these students from your classes sometime during this week (or next) that is convenient for all of us.

Thank you,

Ann Foster

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why did you have to repeat this grade?

Was it a fair or unfair decision? In what way?

How did you feel about having to repeat when it was first mentioned?

What was it like for you when you came to school in September and had to join classes of younger students?

How did the students in your classes this year react to you?

How did you feel about them?

How have your friends from last year treated you?

How have you treated them?

How do you feel about them compared with last year?

What did your parents feel about you having to repeat?

In what ways have their feelings and behaviours changed towards you since last year?

What did your brothers and/or sisters feel about you having to repeat?

In what ways have their feelings and behaviour changed towards you since last year?

Generally, how has your repeating affected your family and the way they treat you?

How do you feel about school this year compared with last year?

What changes have there been in your school work as a result of repeating?

In what ways do you feel that repeating the grade has been worthwhile?

Do you see yourself staying in school until you finish Grade 12?

What kind of work do you think you would like to do when you leave school?

Do you think that schools should make students repeat grades?

What could schools do for students who have failing marks instead of having them repeat a grade?

What else can you add to what you have already said about repeating the grade that would help me understand what it is like for you to have to do that?

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C - 1 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX C - 2 TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX C - 1

STUDENT QUESTIONAIRE

Rate your own feelings about your performance in school this year compared with last year.

1 = much worse than last year

2 = a little bit worse than last year

3 = the same as last year

4 = a little bit better than last year

5 = much better than last year

	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding Math					
Marks in Math test					
Interest in Math					
Understanding Social Studies					
Marks in Social tests					
Interest in Social Studies					
Understanding Science					
Marks in Science tests					
Interest in Science					
Reading skills					
Interest in books					
Writing skills					

	1	2	3	4	5
Written reports					
Spelling					
Grammar					
Understanding Language Arts					
Marks in Language Arts					
Interest in Language Arts					
Speaking up in class					
Doing homework					
Time spent studying					
Feelings about tests					
Remembering information					
Concentrating in class					
Paying attention in class					

What is the best thing about repeating the grade in terms of school work?

What is the worst thing about repeating the grade in terms of school work?

Rate the feelings about your school and your teachers this year compared with last year.

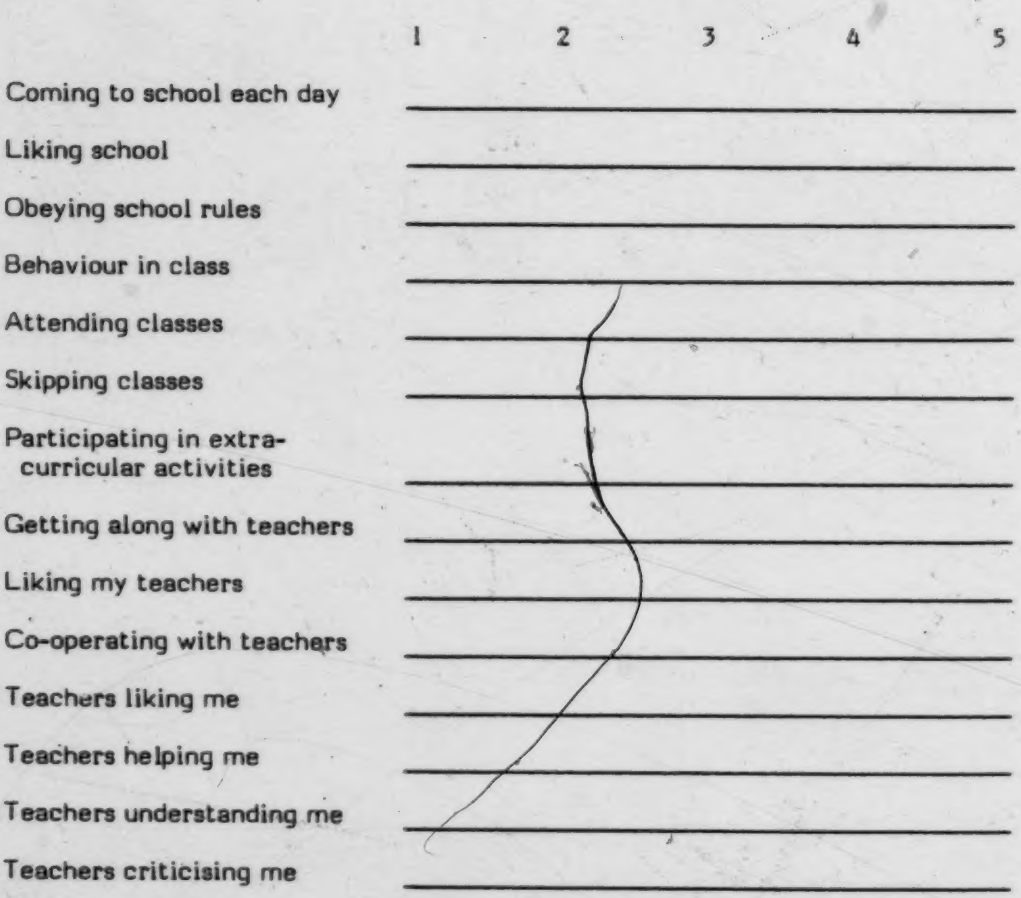
1 = much worse than last year

2 = a little bit worse than last year

3 = the same as last year

4 = a little bit better than last year

5 = much better than last year



Rate your feelings about kids in your class this year as compared with last year.

1 = much LESS than last year

2 = a little bit less than last year

3 = the same as last year

4 = a little bit more than last year

5 = much MORE than last year

	1	2	3	4	5
Kids in my class tease me					
Kids in my class ignore me					
Kids in my class talk about me					
Kids in my class pick on me					
Kids in my class criticise me					
Kids in my class embarrass me					
Kids in my class leave me out					
Kids in my class respect me					
Kids in my class care about me					
Kids in my class understand me					
Kids in my class like me					
Kids in my class are friendly to me					
Kids in my class include me					
Kids in my class like having me around					

	1	2	3	4	5
Kids in my class are interested in me					
I get into fights					
I get into arguments					
I lose my temper					
I hurt other kids' feelings					
I avoid kids in my class					
I get jealous of other kids					
I dislike the kids in my class					
I ignore the kids in my class					
I am lonely					
I respect the kids in my class					
I care about the kids in my class					
I have made friends with the kids in my class					
I like being around the kids in my class					
I help kids in my class					
I trust the kids in my class					
I feel happy about the kids in my class					
The number of friends I have is					

What is the best thing about repeating the grade in terms of friendship?

What is the worst thing about repeating the grade in terms of friendship?

APPENDIX C-2

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Student _____ Grade _____

This student is completing his second year in the above grade. Please compare this year with last year and rate your perceptions of the following:

1 = much worse than last year

2 = a little bit worse than last year

3 = the same as last year

4 = a little bit better than last year

5 = much better than last year

	1	2	3	4	5
This student's achievement (your subject area)					
This student's attitude towards school					
This student's attitude towards teachers					
This student's relationship with classmates					

I would appreciate your answers to the following questions about this student as your perceptions will supplement his/her own about the effects of grade retention and so help give a more complete picture of retention at the Junior High School level.

1. What changes have you noticed in achievement this year compared with last year (your subject area)?
2. What changes if any have you noticed in attitude towards school this year?
3. What changes if any have you noticed in attitude towards teachers this year?
4. What changes if any have you noticed in relationships with same age but promoted peers as compared with last year?
5. How does this student get along with his current classmates?
6. What special provision if any has been made for this student in your subject area, over and above the regular programme?
7. What do you perceive as the advantages to this student of repeating a grade in terms of attitude, achievement and social relationships?
8. What do you perceive as the disadvantages to this student of repeating a grade in terms of attitude, achievement and social relationships?
9. Generally do you support the practice of grade retention at this level?

   If so, why?

   If not, why not?
10. What alternatives to repetition do you suggest for students with failing marks?

APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIOTAPE RECORDING OF STUDENT INTERVIEW

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIOTAPE RECORDING OF GRADE 7 STUDENT

I had to repeat because I wasn't doing very well in school or getting good marks in anything. I can't think of any other reason.

With my marks I knew I was going to fail but I was still mad about it. But I guess it was a fair decision. I was mad because I would have to get new friends and lose my old ones. I'm still angry because I still haven't made any good friends in this grade. They mostly bug me a lot; about my weight, about failing. They bug me about everything. They pick on me a lot. Then I go after them. But they get all huffy and mad and tell the teachers and I get into trouble. I've got a couple of friends in this grade but they're not like the best friends I had last year. But I hardly see them anymore (the friends from last year) because they have different classes to me. I used to see them a lot but they live half way across town so I only see them at school about twice a day just passing in the hallways.

I felt depressed at the end of last year when I got my report card and when Mr. Y. phoned my mom to tell her I had to repeat. I was so mad. I had been so excited about joining my friends in Grade 8. Then they wouldn't let me. I was so mad. I was depressed for about 2 months.

I know the kids in this grade (7), but they are not my friends. I talk to them sometimes but that's all.

I have never felt OK about repeating. I'm always scared that at the end of the year I won't pass again. I couldn't stand that. I think I'm going to pass. I've got better marks but I'm still scared because Mr. D. (Vice Principal), called me down to the office and he said, "Your marks have gone up; you've got a >7%

average now" but he goes, "you have to keep it up". So he says that if I dropped he'd call me down in May but so far he hasn't.

I've worried the whole year. I don't want to repeat again. It's terrifying. I'm trying to do my best. I've got a couple of teachers who really hate me and I hate them. Mrs. F. for instance. I can't ask her a question because I'm scared she'll yell at me. She explains the assignments. I listen but sometimes I just don't get it and when I go up and ask her for extra help she goes "I just told you". She never helps me. All she does is yell. At everybody. Even the smart people; the brains in the class.

I do sometimes fool around in class but sometimes when I don't I get blamed for someone sitting behind me or.....I don't deserve that. I don't argue when I get into trouble and I've done it. I just take the punishment. But I put up a fight when they blame it on me and I got into trouble with Mr. D. for that. I don't deserve it so I'm not going to take it. Teachers weren't so bad last year like as this year. I've got about 2 that really don't like me all that much....I work better with teachers I like. The others get me so mad. I just say "Forget it!" That's where I got my bad marks in those classes because of conflicts with the teachers.

It was very embarrassing in September. When we first signed up like when we came to register, all my friends were there and they shouted over to me "Why aren't you in the Grade 8 line?" None of them knew I'd failed because I'd only seen a couple of them over the summer. So I was in the Grade 7 line and everybody suddenly knew and they all started bugging me "Yeah stupid! You failed" just joking around eh? But embarrassing though. My close friends just

said nothing, they didn't bug me or anything they said "Maybe next year eh?" I also knew some of the Grade 6's coming up into Grade 7 and they were bugging me too "What?? Did you fail dummy?" I'm not a dummy! If teachers get on my case I just don't work, that's all. That's how I get back at them by not working. I get it in the end but that's just my way.

At the start of the year I'd always hide my text books so my friends wouldn't see me carrying Grade 7 books and make fun of that. The Grade 7's didn't talk to me or nothing for the first couple of weeks and I just sat there and did nothing. I felt left out. But I was angry, so I didn't talk to nobody neither. As soon as the kids got to know me they were okay I guess. Then when they really got to know me they started bugging me.

Friends from last year have treated me okay. A couple of them have lockers right beside me so I see them mostly all the time but the other ones I don't see very much. I treat them like I always did; no different.

My parents really weren't mad when I had to repeat. They understood, but they said "We don't want you failing again next year." They tried their hardest at the end of the year to get my marks up - got me tutors and everything else, but it didn't help much. They didn't yell or nothing. But <u>this</u> year they said "You fail <u>again</u> and you're in trouble". I had really good marks at the start of this year. They dropped a little because all the teachers said your marks probably will drop in the 3rd term. And my mom and dad don't understand the way it goes and so they get upset saying "Your marks are dropping". They've changed a little towards me this year. My brother got into a lot of trouble when he was my age, like going out at night and when <u>I</u> do that (and I don't run the streets like he did), my mom gets mad if I don't come in till 10:30 p.m. Like

I'm just outside my house with my friends talking, she just doesn't want me out. She's being a lot stricter this year and it's not fair on me. I'm not like my brother. I'm not going to turn out that way. She's stricter but it's because she doesn't want me to get into trouble, not because I failed.

My brother Phillip is nice. He goes, "You just better not fail next year. We just don't want you turning out like your other brother." My other brother bugs me about it. My anger comes out at him. He was bugging me about school. He was cutting some bread and I just pushed him and he cut himself very badly with the knife. And he also got me mad one time when I brought home my report card eh? It was in my room and he went in there snooping around like he's not supposed to and he found it and he brought it into my mom and dad and he goes, "Have you seen this report card? I never got so many bad marks like this". And I just flew off the handle and he got it. I was so mad I ran out of the house. My sister helps me a lot with my homework now. Repeating hasn't really affected my family much at all.

School is fun if I have the right teachers. Like I don't mind it then. I didn't like school last year because I was mad at the school because of my marks. I know it was my fault but I blamed them. My attitude towards school changed a bit this year because of my marks. This year I feel proud because I got an "A" in Social. My first "A" ever! There has been an improvement in my other marks too. I just got my marks in for Science. The second term I got a 37% and this term I got a 46% and she said my final mark will go over 50% so I WILL pass Science. I know it. I haven't had any special help. I've just gone through the same lot of work as I did last year.

Repeating has been worthwhile in some ways but not in others. I could have done just as good as any other kid last year if I'd had teachers that didn't yell at me for some small mistake. They didn't help me, they just yelled. They just didn't like me. I don't get along very good with teachers but if they like me and I do get along with them I'll do good. I try, but it never works out.

The worst thing about repeating is the time. Just think, you've got a whole extra year to do before you're out of school. It's bad losing the friends who went on, not being able to talk to them every day, and not seeing them very often in the halls.

I feel better about myself this year. I get better marks and that makes me feel better. Other kids say "Well you had this stuff last year so you should be doing better!".

I'm going to stay in school until Grade 12. You have to or you won't get a job. You have to have your Grade 12. I'd like to be a helicopter pilot. I'd like to work with computers too.

I don't think schools should fail students with low marks. I think it should be just like High School where you fail the subject and not the grade. I would have done better in Grade 8 this year because I was just fooling around last year, being lazy and not trying that much. I'm not dumb. I'm still angry about the way things worked out last year. I would have preferred to go on into Grade 8 and have got extra help after school in subjects I'm doing badly in. I still think I should have passed.

Repeating is just stupid. It's really dumb. And I'm not going to go through it all again. I don't care if I do have bad marks, they're not going to fail me again.

APPENDIX E

ORGANISATION OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL DATA

E - 1 THE SIX STAGE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

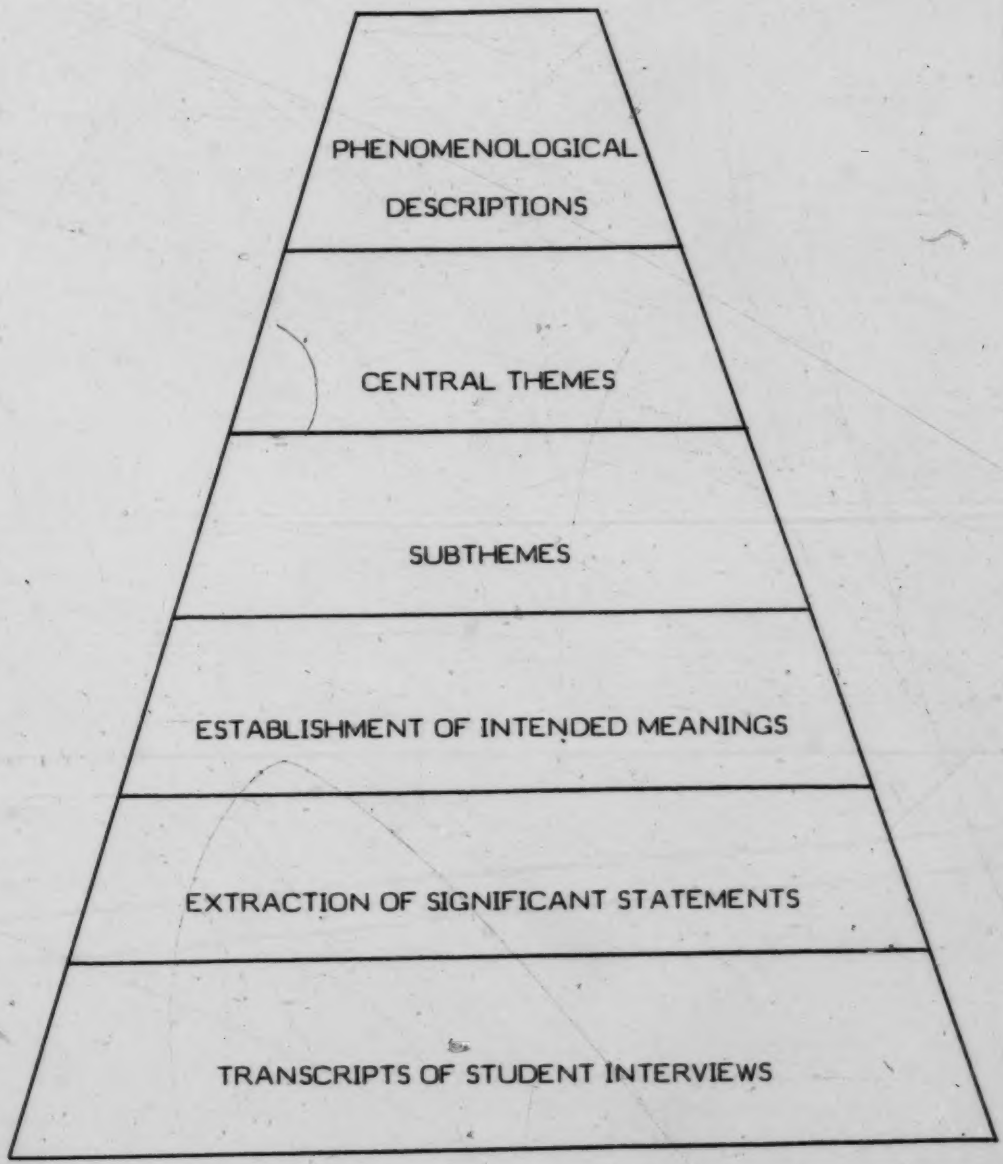
E - 2 EXAMPLE OF STAGES 2 TO 5

E - 3 DATA FROM STUDENT INTERVIEWS

E - 4 DATA FROM TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX E - 1

THE SIX STAGE THEMATIC ANALYSIS



APPENDIX E - 2

EXAMPLE OF STAGES 2 TO 5

CENTRAL THEME INITIAL IMPACT OF THE RETENTION DECISION

SUBTHEMES: Expression of negative emotions

Expression of positive emotions

INTENDED MEANINGS:	SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS (Students' words).
- anger about losing face - hate - depression	"I was really mad. I just hated it. I felt I would look pretty stupid. I felt depressed about it but I got over it in a couple of weeks because my parents told me it was my own fault."
- anger about losing friends - loneliness	"I was mad because I would have to get new friends and lose my old ones. I'm still angry because I still haven't made any good friends in this grade."
- sadness - anger - depression - separation anxiety	"I felt pretty sad about it. All my friends would be leaving me behind. I felt angry lots of times, especially when I first heard it. I have also felt depressed about it. I haven't ever felt OK about it."
- worthlessness - low self esteem - anger	"I felt kind of useless. I didn't feel very good about myself. I was pretty angry."
- frustration - unhappiness	"I felt unhappy .. because I was getting close to passing."
- disillusionment - depression	"I felt kind of sad...It made me most upset about when they told me I wasn't trying hard enough, I thought I was."

- reframing negative into positive	"I felt Oh my god, I've got to repeat the grade. I don't want to do it, but after thinking about it I decided Why not? maybe it's a good idea."
- depression	"I was very upset...for about two weeks in the summer holidays I was really depressed about it."
- shock - blaming self - blaming others - regret - thwarted	"It was a real shock when I found out. I just started crying. I felt pretty bad. I wished that I had done more things. I blamed both myself and the school. I felt so depressed when my mom told me on the phone that I had failed, but I tried to hide it. I've never felt good about it because I was so looking forward to going to High School."
- worry - apprehension - depression	"I was like worried. Sometimes you have to get new friends and that bothered me. I felt a little depressed and upset - it lasted for about a month. I've never felt happy about repeating."
- upset - anger - apprehension	"I knew it probably would happen but I was still a bit upset when it did. I felt angry at myself for not working...I worried a lot...about my friends, peer pressure, how I'd get along with the new people in my class."
- upset - anger - disappointment	"It had been expected so it wasn't that much of a shock but at first I was still really upset about it. I was disappointed in myself and upset that I had disappointed my parents too. I was really mad at myself."
- depression	"I felt down a little when they first told me...this depression lasted for about two months...The thing that made it so upsetting was that I'm not with my friends and it's just a waste of one whole year."

- depression - frustration - self blame	"When I first found out I was failing I got more depressed and that lasted about two months...I was more mad at myself for missing because I knew I could get the marks. I blamed myself."
- hostility - anger	"I felt terrible...I felt like killing the Principal. I was so angry...I felt angry for about two months - all through the summer holidays."
- discouragement - anger	"I said to my mom "I'm never going to school again." I was really mad at the Principal because he failed me but I only cried about it twice."
- regret - acceptance	"I wasn't too surprised about it. It didn't really bother me...I think I felt regret about repeating more than anger."
- dissatisfaction - acceptance	"I wasn't really surprised...I didn't really feel bad about it. But I think everyone should have a say in the decision...whether you fail or not; whether you think it's good or not."
- depression - failure identity	"I did feel depressed because I felt like a failure even though it wasn't my fault. This lasted about two months; May and June last year."
- initial anger - neutral	"(Even though I had a say in the decision) I felt angry a few times just thinking about it. Leaving all my friends. This feeling lasted a couple of months. I got over it during the summer holidays. I never felt really upset about having to repeat, but I've never felt happy about it either."

APPENDIX E-3

DATA FROM STUDENT INTERVIEWS.

REASONS FOR REPEATING.

Expression of negative reasons.

- failing marks,
- lack of effort,
- poor attitude towards school
- work incomplete,
- concern about problems at home,
- inappropriate behaviour,
- lengthy absences,
- immaturity,

Expression of positive reasons.

- opportunity for academic improvement,
- opportunity to capitalize on potential to learn,
- a second chance,

INITIAL IMPACT OF THE RETENTION DECISION.

Expression of negative reasons.

- anger,
- depression,
- blaming others,
- regret,
- blaming self,
- shock,
- frustration,
- worthlessness,
- low self-esteem,
- apprehension,
- disappointment,
- dissatisfaction,
- discouragement,
- hostility,
- disillusionment,
- failure identify,
- loneliness,

Expression of positive reasons.

- nonchalance,
- reframing negative into positive,
- acceptance,

CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DECISION.

Appropriate retribution for.

- failing marks,
- lack of effort,
- inappropriate behaviour,
- lengthy absences,
- incompletion of required work,
- poor study skills,
- immaturity
- lack of prerequisite skills for next grade,
- poor attitude to school work,
- inappropriate placement last year,

Inappropriate retribution due to.

- thwarting of future plans,
- promotion of less able or equally able students,
- being singled out from peers,
- impact of permanent separation from peers,

RETAINED STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL REACTIONS IN SEPTEMBER 1983.

Expression of negative reasons.

- embarrassment about losing face,
- embarrassment about being harassed,
- embarrassment about being noticed,
- lack of belonginess,
- lowering of self-esteem,
- fear of being rejected,
- shame,
- depression,
- feeling left out,
- difficulty making new friends,
- feeling different,
- boredom,
- animosity towards new classmates,

Expression of positive reasons.

- acceptance,
- enthusiasm,
- feeling comfortable,

COPING BEHAVIOURS IN SEPTEMBER 1983.

Negative behaviours.

- withdrawal,
- avoidance,
- procrastinating,
- hostility,
- protected by "tough guy",
- reputation,
- aggressive retaliatory comments,

Positive behaviours.

- ignoring negative comments,
- identification with classmates:
  - of same size,
  - of same age,
  - with same interests,
  - also retained,
- reframing negatives into positives,
- making gestures of friendship,
- voluntarily improving own behaviour,
- rationalization,

PERCEIVED REACTIONS OF PARENTS TO THE RETENTION.

Perceived negative reactions.

- anger towards child,
- increased strictness,
- increased sensitivity to deteriorating marks,
- disappointment,
- threatening,
- recriminating,
- increased supervizing,
- lecturing,

Perceived positive reactions.

- understanding,
- more interest in school work,
- helpful,
- accepting,
- nonpressuring,
- sensitivity towards students feelings about retention,
- compassion,
- no change in treatment,

PERCEIVED REACTIONS OF SIBLINGS TO THE RETENTION.

Perceived negative reactions.

- insults,
- taunts,
- ridicule,
- put-downs,
- warnings,
- embarrassment,

Perceived positive reactions.

- compassion,
- tuition,
- understanding,
- nonchalance,
- unchanged attitude and behaviour,
- acceptance,

REPEATING IN TERMS OF THE ACADEMIC.

Perceived disadvantages.

- boredom,
- lack of understanding,
- marks still low,
- no novelty effect to stimulate and hold interest,
- lack of a challenge,
- lack of interest,
- lack of effort,
- failure identity,
- lack of motivation,
- irrelevance of course content,

Perceived advantages.

- improved marks,
- better understanding,
- improved attention,
- improved learning of course content,
- increased effort,
- heightened interest,
- better prepared for class,
- work easier due to familiarity with course content,
- less frustrating,
- more active participation,
- more responsible about seeking help,

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL.

Expression of negative reasons.	Expression of positive reasons.
- perpetuation of dislike, - increased dislike, - perceived as changing for the worse, - perceived as boring,	- O.K., - enjoyable, - acceptance of it because of friendship, - acknowledgement of the importance of a good education, - perceived as easier, - improvement in attitude towards it,

ATTITUDE TOWARDS TEACHERS.

Expression of negative reasons.	Expression of positive reasons.
- anger regarding teachers' insensitivity, - hostility towards teachers, - recriminations, - embarrassment concerning negative comments, - continuing dislike, - questioning of teacher competance, - annoyance regarding lack of extra help, - inability to relate to some, - resentment,	- acknowledgement of the importance of good student/ teacher relationships, - more stimulating, - more helpful, - some perceived as competant,

ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEERS IN CLASSES THIS YEAR.

Indications of negative attitude.

- lack of involvement,
- establishment of emotional distance,
- disdain of developmental differences,
- lack of rapport,
- withholding gestures of friendship,
- aggressiveness,
- self-imposed isolation,
- impatience,
- embarrassment,

Indications of positive attitude.

- acceptance of differences (emotional, intellectual, physical), acknowledgement and appreciation of positive characteristics,
- reciprocating gestures of friendship,
- identification with classmates possessing selected characteristics:
  - same age,
  - same size,
  - same interests/same situation,
  - mutual respect,
  - feelings of equality,
  - advice giving,
  - caring,

PERCEIVED ATTITUDE OF CURRENT CLASSMATES.

Perceived negative attitude.

- initially avoiding,
- taunting and insulting,
- initially cautious,
- displaying lack of interest,

Perceived positive attitude.

- accepting,
- friendly,
- encouraging,
- respectful,
- admiring of:
  - size,
  - knowledge and experience,
  - reputation,
  - age,

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SAME-AGE-BUT-PROMOTED PEERS.

Expression of negative reasons.

- concern about estrangement,
- retrospective criticism about friendships,
- unhappiness regarding limited (or no) opportunity for social interaction,
- feelings of loss,
- awareness of absence,

Expression of positive reasons.

- maintenance of friendship bonds:
  - despite lack of contact at school,
  - through out of school activities,
- confidence in ability to re-establish friendships at a later date,

PERCEIVED ATTITUDE OF SAME-AGE-BUT-PROMOTED PEERS.

Perceived negative attitude.

- deterioration of friendships,
- termination of friendships,
- reduced interaction at school,
- insulting comments,
- ignoring,
- alienation,

Perceived positive attitude.

- acceptance of the situation,
- support for the retained student,
- efforts to maintain the friendship,
- no change in attitude, feelings, or behaviour,
- continuing association out of school,
  caring,
  compassion,

FEELINGS ABOUT SELF.

Expression of negative reasons.

- questionning of abilities and intelligence,
- disappointment,
- lack of confidence,
- loss of dignity,
- fear of failing again,

Expression of positive reasons.

- more mature,
- more sensible,
- more responsible,
- improved behaviour,
- better adjusted,
- more confidence in self and abilities,
- feeling OK,

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

Negative.

- possibility of dropping-out,
- uncertainty,
- pessimism,
- lack of long range plans,

Positive.

- determination to complete Grade 12,
- optimism regarding the future,
- long range possibilities in terms of jobs,

THE PRACTICE OF GRADE RETENTION.

Expression of negative opinions.

- unconditional opposition because of:
  - the time factor,
  - money factors,
  - friendships factors,
  - emotional factors,
- conditional opposition providing student prepared to improved,
- providing student approaches promotion positively,

Expression of positive opinions.

- unconditional support,
- conditional support:
  - only once in a school career,
  - only for low marks,
  - if parents and student input indicates their support,
  - if student has negative attitude, e.g. is lazy and uncooperative,

ALTERNATIVES TO GRADE RETENTION AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL.

- more teacher assistance,
- more detentions for incomplete work,
- private tutoring in problem areas,
- attendance at summer school,
- extra homework,
- counselling,
- automatic promotion with student to sink-or-swim,
- different levels of each subject at each grade level,
- failing subjects as opposed to failing a grade, homeroom being with same-age peers,
- night school,
- special classes with easier versions of the programme,
- different levels of the Grade 12 diploma,

APPENDIX E-4

DATA FROM TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRES.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF REPEATING IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Observations of disadvantages.

- lack of motivation,
- no apparant effort to improve,

Observations of advantages.

- improved effort,
- improved skills,
- improved work habits,
- completion of the program,
- stronger achievement,
- better organized,
- more responsible,
- improved attendance,
- more co-operative,
- more self confident,

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RETAINED STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL.

Negative perceptions.

- none

Positive perceptions.

- better attitude,
- more responsible manner,
- involved in fewer negative situations,
- more punctual,
- improved attendance,
- more confident,
- more involved,

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RETAINED STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS TEACHERS.

Negative perceptions.

- none.

Positive perceptions.

- more co-operative,
- more pleasant,
- increased self confidence,
- responds better to suggestions,
- fewer power struggles,
- improved attitude,
- more mature,
- friendlier,

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RETAINED STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH CURRENT CLASSMATES.

Negative perceptions.

- lack of patience,
- few overtures of friendship proffered,

Positive perceptions.

- good interaction,
- mutual respect,
- improved friendships compared with last year,
- more aware of peer group pressure,
- developed extended circle of friends,

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RETAINED STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH SAME-AGE-BUT-PROMOTED PEERS.

Negative perceptions.

- lack of opportunity for interaction,

Positive perceptions.

- preference for their company,
- closer association than with current classmates,
- maintenance of friendship bonds,

TEACHER FEELINGS REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF GRADE REPETITION.

Expression of opposition.

- none

Undecided.

- ambivalence due to observed pros and cons,

Expression of support.

- conditional support dependant on the following factors:
  - maturity,
  - home situation,
  - age,
  - amount of work completed,
- unconditional support because of advantages of repeating,